



WADSWORTH ATHENEUM
MUSEUM OF ART

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Middle Eastern and Mediterranean Landscapes by Renowned Hartford Artist Frederic Church at Wadsworth Atheneum

Hartford, Conn. (May 2, 2018) – The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art will present “Frederic Church: A Painter’s Pilgrimage,” bringing together approximately 50 of the celebrated Hudson River School painter’s compositions of sacred terrain in the Middle East and the Mediterranean. Frederic Edwin Church (1826–1900) was born in Hartford and had deep ties to the Wadsworth Atheneum, which maintains significant holdings of his early landscapes. Organized by Kenneth J. Myers, curator of American art at the Detroit Institute of Arts, “Frederic Church: A Painter’s Pilgrimage” explores the enduring appeal of pilgrimage through a lesser-known body of work resulting from the artist’s journey to powerful sites of spiritual and historical significance in the late 1860s. The exhibition opens to the public at noon on June 2, 2018 and is on view through Aug. 26, 2018.

A leading painter of 19th-century America, Frederic Church was the most popular and financially successful painter in the United States during his lifetime. As a young artist Church's first formal training was facilitated by Atheneum founder Daniel Wadsworth, who arranged for Church's apprenticeship with painter Thomas Cole, the father of the Hudson River School. As he further established his career, Church traveled to remote places to sketch majestic scenes unfamiliar to his American audience, turning them into dramatic, large-scale paintings. These travels provided Church with ideas and material to produce major paintings for his wealthy patrons, including prominent American industrialists and financiers such as Hartford's Timothy Mather Allyn, J. Pierpont Morgan and firearms manufacturer Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt.

"This is a rare opportunity for our audience to explore a side of Church's working process and fierce entrepreneurship beyond the usual experience of landscape paintings," says Robert H. Schutz, Jr., Associate Curator of American Paintings and Sculpture Erin Monroe. "Church's story started in Hartford, so it is particularly fitting for the Atheneum to feature this exploration of his pilgrimage as a way to reconnect the artist with his personal and professional origins."

From 1868–1869, Church, his wife and their young son visited the lands of modern-day Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Jordan and southeastern Turkey, with Church taking expeditions to Athens, Damascus, Petra, Baalbek and Jerusalem. Church made countless small-scale pencil drawings and oil sketches on these trips, noting observations including colors, light, time of day and even weather patterns. Upon returning to his New York studio Church created large-scale compositions such as "Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives" (1870) and "Syria by the Sea" (1873), seamlessly merging depictions of factual places with symbolic light and atmospheric qualities. "A Painter's Pilgrimage" compares numerous studies completed during Church's expeditions with his final major paintings, offering insight into his artistic process. Whereas Church's American themed canvases—including depictions of Niagara Falls and the coast of Maine—captured the sublime in nature, his views of holy sites concentrated on human history. Church paid homage to the sacred grounds and ancient past through an emphasis on architectural ruins—broken columns, arches and tumbled walls. "These historic views are especially compelling and relevant now," says Monroe. "It is a chance to foster conversation around the destruction and urgent need for preservation of cultural heritage sites in the 21st century."

The impact of Church's Middle Eastern travels is readily apparent at Olana, the elaborate home and studio he designed on a 250-acre estate in Hudson, New York. Now a historic property, Olana's prominent features include towers and block masonry, fanciful windows and porches and Middle Eastern motifs executed in colored brick, wood, slate, ceramic tile and stenciling; select sketches by Church in preparation for Olana will feature in the exhibition. A selection of objects chosen for the Hartford exhibition from the Wadsworth Atheneum's collection ranges from antiquities to 19th-century sculpture and costume, evidencing the history of pilgrimages to the Holy Land and bringing to life the deep American interest in connecting to this part of the world.

An illustrated catalogue accompanies the exhibition.

Public Program Highlights

Tours of "Frederic Church: A Painter's Pilgrimage" are offered Saturdays and Sundays at 2:30 p.m. from June 9–Aug. 26. Free lectures include "Sacred Geographies: Frederic Church, the Holy Land, & the Hudson Valley" with Yale University professor Jennifer Raab, June 12 at 6 p.m. "Art After Dark: Rock the Kasbah" on June 7 at 5 p.m. will feature live music, exhibition

tours and an outdoor bazaar; tickets are \$5-10. Visit thewadsworth.org for a full schedule of programs, films and events.

Exhibition Support

This exhibition has been organized by the Detroit Institute of Arts. Generous support for the exhibition has been provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art and the Henry Luce Foundation. Additional support has been provided by the National Endowment for the Arts. A significant loan of objects has been provided by Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum. Major support provided by Mrs. John M. Gibbons Jr. and The Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation. Generous support provided by Duff Ashmead & Eric Ort, The Cheryl Chase and Stuart Bear Family Foundation, and Sharon & Henry Martin. Program support provided in part by the Richard P. Garmany Fund at the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. Sustaining support for the Wadsworth Atheneum provided by Newman's Own Foundation and the Greater Hartford Arts Council's United Arts Campaign.

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.

Note to editors: High-resolution image files to accompany publicity of this exhibition are available for download at <http://press.thewadsworth.org>. Please email taryn.bunger@wadsworthatheneum.org for login credentials.

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