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Twenty-Seven Major Artists Showcased in Be Seen: Portrait Photography Since Stonewall

Hartford, Conn. (June 13, 2019)—A new exhibition at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art features 27 major artists who have used portraiture to challenge, subvert, and play with societal norms of gender and sexuality since the 1969 Stonewall Riots—an important turning point in the LGBTQ+ rights movement. Leveraging the ‘reality effect’—the prevalent belief that photographs accurately depict reality—artists including Nan Goldin, Peter Hujar, Robert Mapplethorpe, Catherine Opie, Cindy Sherman, and Andy Warhol respond to how gender identity and sexual orientation were viewed historically and how they are lived today. The over 50 works of art in *Be Seen: Portrait Photography Since Stonewall* compel us to consider how we perform our identity through our clothing, accessories, speech, and bodily expression, in an effort to *be seen*. The exhibition opens June 22 and will be on view through September 15, 2019 overlapping with Hartford’s celebration of Pride Fest on September 14.

“This summer at the Wadsworth we have seized the opportunity to celebrate the artistic accomplishments of many artists working in portraiture,” says Patricia Hickson, Emily Hall Tremaine Curator of Contemporary Art at the Wadsworth. “The majority of the portraits in *Be Seen* are part of our collection, including ten new additions initiated by the exhibition with the purpose of diversifying our holdings.”

Offerings in conjunction with *Be Seen* include a companion tour program, *Out on View: LGBTQ+ Perspectives on the Collection*, which connects visitors with queer subject matter throughout the collection galleries highlighting works of art from antiquity to contemporary. The tour takes place at the Wadsworth on July 13 and August 24 with Professor Andrew Lear who curated an accompanying *Out on View* mobile audio tour. There is also a mobile audio tour of works in *Be Seen* titled *Be Heard*, which provides insights from the exhibition's artists and the local LGBTQ+ community. Both audio tours are available online via tap.thewadsworth.org. Photography sourced from an Instagram campaign and juried by Ricardo Reyes, Edith Dale Monson Gallery Curator and Director at University of Hartford, and Judith Thorpe, Professor and MFA Program Director at University of Connecticut, will be displayed as an adjunct to the exhibition.

Anchoring the historical context for *Be Seen* is the short film *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* (2018), written and directed by Tourmaline and Sasha Wortzel. The film, which includes archival material, imagines transgender artist and activist Marsha P. Johnson's life in the hours before she ignited the Stonewall Riots. Historically, in the early morning hours of June 28, 1969, four policemen raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar and dance club in Greenwich Village, NY. The resulting demonstration soon escalated into a violent riot that lasted for six days and drew national attention. In the United States and around the world, societal attitudes and laws that discriminate against the LGBTQ+ community have changed drastically since the Stonewall Riots. Yet, from the landmark 2015 Supreme Court decision on marriage equality, to the #MeToo movement, and the ongoing battle over transgender rights, recent cultural flash points have exposed the ways in which gender and sexuality still determine how we think about ourselves and each other, and how we move through the world.

“This summer, when we're looking at the complexities and opportunities of portraiture from across the ages—from Giorgione's *La Vecchia* (1502-08), to the portrayal of the founding fathers in John Trumbull's *The Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776* (1832), and Tom Burr's Minimalist sculptures dotting the museum—*Be Seen* is a timely and important examination of the rich variety of portrait photography in the past five decades,” says Thomas J. Loughman, Director and CEO of the Wadsworth.

Be Seen examines portrait photography through four themes: *Picturing Community*, *Warhol and His Legacy*, *Performing Identity*, and *Reclaiming Art History*. Works by Nan Goldin, Mark Morrisroe, Zanele Muholi, Catherine Opie, and others, capture the everyday lives of their subjects in *Picturing Community*. Their portraits make visible people and communities that were—and still are—often silenced and unseen. This section includes significant work by artists of the Boston School. *Warhol and His Legacy* acknowledges the influence of Andy Warhol, an artist who was famously queer at a time

when most LGBTQ+ public figures were still in the closet. Following Warhol's example, younger artists such as Robert Mapplethorpe, Patti Smith, and Peter Hujar created portraits that celebrate queer individuals and in some cases their own queer identities. In *Performing Identity*, gender and sexuality are just two of the many identities depicted in self-portraits by Martine Gutierrez, Cindy Sherman, Iké Udé, Chris Verene, and Ana Mendieta. *Reclaiming Art History* shows how contemporary LGBTQ+ photographers are forming an alternative art history to include bodies and communities that rarely appear in works of art from the past. Yasumasa Morimura, John O'Reilly, Paul Mpagi Sepuya, Mickalene Thomas, and others, challenge the history of art directly by restaging or appropriating famous paintings.

Artists in the Exhibition

Tad Beck (American, born 1968)

Philip-Lorca diCorcia (American, born 1951, West Hartford, CT)

Nan Goldin (American, born 1953)

Martine Gutierrez (American, born 1989)

Peter Hujar (American, 1934–1987)

Christopher Makos (American, born 1948)

Robert Mapplethorpe (American, 1946–1989)

Subject of multiple exhibitions at the Wadsworth including, *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment* (1989).

Mark Morrisroe (American, 1959–1989)

Ana Mendieta (American, born Cuba, 1948–1985)

Yasumasa Morimura (Japanese, born 1951)

Zanele Muholi (South African, born 1972)

Catherine Opie (American, born 1961)

John O'Reilly (American, born 1930)

Jack Pierson (American, born 1960)

Paul Mpagi Sepuya (American, born 1982)

Cindy Sherman (American, born 1954)

Patti Smith (American, born 1946)

Sage Sohier (American, born 1954)

Gail Thacker (American, born 1959)

Mickalene Thomas (American, born 1971)

Tourmaline and Sasha Wortzel (both American, born 1983)

Iké Udé (Nigerian, born 1964)

Conrad Ventur (American, born 1977)

Chris Verene (American, born 1969)

Andy Warhol (American, 1928–1987)

Subject of past exhibitions at the Wadsworth including, *About Face: Andy Warhol Portraits*, 1999.

David Wojnarowicz (American, 1954–1992)

Related Programs

June 23, Varla Jean Merman performs *Under a Big Top*, 7pm.

June 28, Gallery Talk with Patricia Hickson, noon.

June 29, John Waters takes the stage for an evening of discussion followed by a book signing and film screening of *Cecil B. Demented*, 7pm.

July 13, *Out on View* collection tour with Andrew Lear, noon.

July 17, Art In Focus tour of photographs from Conrad Ventur's *Montezland* series, noon.

July 26, Gallery Talk with Emily Handlin, Marsted Curatorial Fellow for Contemporary Art, noon.

August 10, Perspectives: LGBTQ+ Health Advocacy, 10am–noon.

August 14, Gallery Talk with *Be Seen* artist Conrad Ventur, noon.

August 24, *Out on View* collection tour with Andrew Lear, noon.

Be Seen Film Series includes screenings of *The Happy Prince* and *Before Homosexuals* (June 27 at 7pm; June 28 & 30 at 2pm); *Rafiki* (July 12–14 at 2pm); *The Cakemaker* (July 19–21 at 2pm); *To a More Perfect Union* (July 26 & 28 at 2pm); and *Kiki* (August 2 at 2pm; August 3 free teen screening at 11am).

Tours of the exhibition take place on Saturdays & Sundays at 2:30pm June 29 – September 15, 2019.

Exhibition and Program Support

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About the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

Founded in 1842 with a vision for infusing art into the American experience, the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art is home to a collection of nearly 50,000 works of art spanning 5,000 years and encompassing European art from antiquity through contemporary as well as American art from the 1600s to today. The Wadsworth Atheneum's five connected buildings—representing architectural styles including Gothic Revival, modern International Style, and 1960s Brutalism—are located at 600 Main Street in Hartford, Conn. Hours: Wednesday–Friday: 11am–5pm; Saturday and Sunday: 10am–5pm Admission: \$5–15; discounts for members, students, and seniors. Free admission for Hartford residents with Wadsworth Welcome registration. Free “happy hour” admission 4–5pm. Public phone: (860) 278-2670; website: thewadsworth.org.

Images: Mickalene Thomas, *Racquel with Les Trois Femmes*, 2018. Chromogenic print. Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, The Douglas Tracy Smith and Dorothy Potter Smith Fund, 2019.3.4 © Mickalene Thomas, Courtesy of the artist and Yancey Richardson; Paul Mpagi Sepuya, *Study Reflecting Dureau (0X5A 1227)*, 2017. Archival pigment print. Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Purchased through the gift of Robinson A. and Nancy D. Grover, 2019.3.5. © Paul Mpagi Sepuya. Courtesy of the artist and Yancey Richardson; Catherine Opie, *Pigpen*, 1993. C-print. Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Alexander A. Goldfarb Contemporary Art Acquisition Fund, 2019.4.1. © Catherine Opie. Courtesy Regen Projects, Los Angeles and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, and Seoul.

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