



**WADSWORTH ATHENEUM**  
MUSEUM OF ART

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Media Contact:** Kim Hugo, (860) 838-4082

[Kim.Hugo@wadsworthatheneum.org](mailto:Kim.Hugo@wadsworthatheneum.org)

Image files to accompany publicity of this exhibition will be available for download at <http://press.thewadsworth.org>. Email to request login credentials.



**A Rotation of Singular Masterpieces at the Wadsworth**

Hartford, Conn. (Oct. 28, 2019)—An exhibition series at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art brings singular masterpieces on view. Organized in recognition of the Wadsworth’s 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the series presents a different iconic work of art every two months. The installations will populate a recently reclaimed gallery on the second floor of the Avery Memorial building, a space designed to promote close looking. Presenting each work in isolation allows for unique experiences with these exceptional works of art.

“Harvesting timeless themes that have contemporary currency for this series has been a joy and a challenge for the entire museum,” said Linda Roth, Senior Curator and Charles C. and Eleanor Lamont Cunningham Curator of European Decorative Arts. “It has provided an opportunity for us to hone our skills as story tellers and share with our visitors the complexity and wonder of the masterpieces in our care.”

The first installation—*Couture at Court* (on view through November 10, 2019)—features a gown worn by the Countess Sophie Petrovna Shouloff Benckendorff, wife of the Russian ambassador to England. Designed by the House of Worth circa 1890 this icon of cosmopolitan fashion is a product of the etiquette and protocols dictated by the Russian and English Courts. With its embroidery, gold thread, and thousands of freshwater pearls,

the dress prompts an examination of how originality and personality were expressed a century ago.

*Couture at Court* will be followed by *The Mathematics of Elegance* (opening November 20, 2019). Two notable high chests, attributed to the workshop of Connecticut cabinetmaker Eliphalet Chapin, demonstrate the classical proportioning and geometric construction as reflected in sophisticated eighteenth-century design. Based on new scholarship the components of this high chest, an icon of Connecticut furniture, are theorized to be rooted in mathematics related to the Ionic order. The study of classical architecture's five orders was seen as essential to understanding perspective and geometric construction. With little more than a compass, a straight edge, and a few sheets of paper Chapin designed exceptional furniture both pleasing to the eye and to the rational mind.

*Cutting Edge: Noguchi's Aluminum Monolith Sesshū, 1958* will open January 22, 2020. A sculptural icon by Isamu Noguchi, *Sesshū* exemplifies the Japanese American artist's commitment to synthesizing disparate cultures. Noguchi attributed his longstanding interest in making three-dimensional sculpture from two-dimensional materials to his childhood training in origami and *kirigami*—the Japanese art of cutting and folding paper. Off view since 1968, the recently conserved *Sesshū* was created from a single sheet of Alcoa (Aluminum Company of America) manufactured aluminum, which was not considered a proper fine art material in the 1950s. The artist used industrial equipment to cut and bend the flat sheet into a form that simultaneously evokes a Japanese screen, a woodblock landscape, and a modern skyscraper.

Future installations will feature *The Old Man and Death*, a 1773 painting by Joseph Wright of Derby and an ivory sculpture, *The Fall of Man* dated from before 1650. This focused exhibition series will continue through the spring of 2020.

**Image captions (left to right):** *Court dress* (French), c. 1890–1905. House of Worth. Silk satin with embroidery of gold thread, sequins, crystals, and freshwater pearls. Purchased from Lady Nathalie Ridley with funds contributed by Miss Elizabeth Hicks, 1962.459; *High Chest*, 1775-85. Attributed to Eliphalet Chapin (American, 1741-1807). Cherry and pine. Made in East Windsor Hill, CT. Gift of the Society for Savings, founded by Daniel Wadsworth in 1819, and Bank of Boston Connecticut, 1993.52. Photo by Gavin Ashworth; Isamu Noguchi, *Sesshū*, 1958. Aluminum. Gift of an anonymous donor, 1962.259.

### **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](http://thewadsworth.org).

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