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Series of Four Rosalba Carriera Pastels Reunited After Over Half a Century on View at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

Hartford, Conn. (November 8, 2021)—An important series of four pastels by Rosalba Carriera has been reunited for the first time in over half a century and is on view at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, in Hartford, Connecticut in the exhibition By Her Hand: Artemisia Gentileschi and Italian Women Artists, 1500-1800. This is the first time that a complete series of pastels by Rosalba Carriera has been presented in the United States. The series is on view in By Her Hand through January 9, 2022.

“Rosalba Carriera quickly rose to fame during her lifetime, thanks in large part to her brilliant pastels. A visit to the Wadsworth Atheneum is the only opportunity to see this significant set of four pastels,” said Oliver Tostmann, Susan Morse Hilles Curator of European Art at the Wadsworth. “The set’s striking luminosity, rare freshness, and intricate subject matter constitutes a highpoint in Carriera’s career. Their timely reunification is a major attraction in By Her Hand.”

The four pastels were separated in the early 1960s when the series was split up among two siblings. It is thought that they remained together in Venice, Italy from the time they were created, in the early to mid-1720s until this split.
In 2020, two of the pastels, The Muse Calliope and Allegory of Faith, were sold to a Connecticut collector. These two were included in the original plan for By Her Hand and were on view when the exhibition opened to the public on September 30, 2021.

When the remaining two pastels from the series, The Muse Polymnia and The Muse Urania, came on the market in late summer of this year they were eventually sold to the same collector and were added to the exhibition in October. Their installation in By Her Hand marks the first time the four pastels have been reunited in 60 years.

“Presenting a complete set of Rosalba Carriera pastels at the Wadsworth Atheneum is an astonishing event. To be able to exhibit two pastels was good fortune; to now be able to show all four looks providential. We are deeply grateful to the selfless collector for so generously sharing them with the public during the run of By Her Hand,” said Matthew Hargraves, Interim Robert H. Schutz Jr. Chief Curator at the Wadsworth.

Hailed by her contemporaries as “la prima pittrice de l’Europa” (the “first woman painter of Europe”), Rosalba Carriera is best known today for her elegant pastels commonly depicting portraits and allegories. While most of them portray individual likenesses, she occasionally worked in series. Though series are rare, the pastels on view in By Her Hand were recorded as such when they were copied by an unknown hand during the eighteenth century.

This important addition to By Her Hand adds a valuable layer to the story revealed by the exhibition. By Her Hand celebrates the long-overlooked contributions of artists like Rosalba Carriera, and aims to inspire continued reexaminations of the role of women artists throughout the history of art.

Exhibition and Program Support

By Her Hand: Artemisia Gentileschi and Women Artists in Italy, 1500-1800 is generously supported by the Cheryl Chase and Stuart Bear Family Foundation, JPMorgan Chase & Co., the National Endowment for the Arts, The David T. Langrock Foundation, the Robert Lehman Foundation, the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation, the Tavolozza Foundation, the Private Art Dealers Association, Linda Cheverton Wick and Walter Wick, the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, and the Dau Family Foundation.

Sustaining support for the Wadsworth Atheneum is provided by the Greater Hartford Arts Council’s United Arts Campaign with support from the Department of Economic and Community Development, Connecticut Office of the Arts.

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 are noon–5pm Thursdays–Sundays. Visitors are required to wear a face mask/covering while inside the museum. The library, food service, and Austin House are currently closed to the public. Admission: $5–15; discounts for members, students and seniors. Free admission for Hartford residents with Wadsworth Welcome registration. Free “happy hour” admission 4–5pm. Advance ticket registration via thewadsworth.org is encouraged, not required. Phone: (860) 278-2670; website: thewadsworth.org.

Image caption: Series of four Rosalba Carriera pastels on view in By Her Hand at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT, through January 9, 2022.

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