PRESS RELEASE

The Amistad Center for Art & Culture debuts Art and Activism at Tougaloo College

National tour of civil rights works starts at The Amistad Center for Art & Culture at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

Opens October 22, 2022

Hartford, Conn. (October 20, 2022)—The Amistad Center for Art & Culture at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art will debut an exhibition of civil rights-inspired art from the collection of Tougaloo College in Jackson, Mississippi. With nearly 35 works plus archival material, Art and Activism at Tougaloo College features an important collection representative of the College’s efforts to advance the cause for civil rights for the past 60 years. Co-organized by the American Federation of Arts (AFA) and Tougaloo College, the exhibition will be on view October 22, 2022–January 16, 2023.

In the spring of 1963, the New York Art Committee for Tougaloo College established Mississippi’s first collection of modern art which was envisioned to be “an interracial oasis in which the fine arts are the focus and magnet.” This made the college a unique hub of European and New York School modernism.

That same year, Tougaloo College had received national attention when an integrated group of Tougaloo students and faculty participated in the lunch counter sit-in at Woolworth’s in downtown Jackson. The event was covered by media outlets across the country, shining a spotlight on the racial tensions in the Deep South and serving as an important catalyst for the causes of civil rights. This recognition made Tougaloo a center for the fight for equality.

“The Amistad Center is proud to be the first to host this incredible exhibition that brings the interplay between art and civil rights into sharper focus,” said Kimberly Kersey, Executive Director of The Amistad Center for Art & Culture. “Through thoughtful curation of key works from the Tougaloo College Art Collection, Art and Activism explores the undeniable voice of artists during times of social change, a theme with renewed relevance today.”

Comprised of approximately 35 artworks in a range of media by both European and African American artists such as David Driskell, Francis Picabia, Elizabeth Catlett, Alma Thomas, Pablo Picasso, Richard Mayhew, Charles White and Hale Woodruff, the exhibition gives insight into a complex American collection established at the intersections of modern art and social justice.
“We are thrilled that The Amistad Center is bringing this exhibition to the Wadsworth,” said Jeffrey N. Brown, CEO of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art. “The works from the Tougaloo College Art Collections will speak to people here in Hartford with as much power as they do at home in Mississippi. In addition to showcasing a rich and significant collection, this presentation is a reminder of the unique ways in which art contributes to our society, and the consequential need to make it available to as many people as possible.”

“The founding of the art collection at Tougaloo College sits at the intersection of two major American art and social movements, Civil Rights and the New York School,” explained curator Turry M. Flucker. “Both movements landed on the world stage with fierce intensity and chartered a new course that required self-reflection and a serious examination of a rapidly changing society. Since the Collections’ founding in 1963 and their growth after 1967, what has become increasingly clear for me is that a full understanding of the people, the history and the development of the Tougaloo College Art Collections and their connection to the 1950’s and the 1960’s art scene in New York City is needed now more than ever. Like America itself, the history of the art at Tougaloo is a fascinating yet complicated narrative that is replete with a group of diverse individuals who believed that art could be the catalyst for societal change. My ongoing commitment is to recognize the members of the art collections’ founding committee, the New York Art Committee for Tougaloo College and their colleagues who were among the college’s greatest benefactors and champions of social justice.”

After the exhibition’s Hartford debut, it will travel to the Oklahoma City Museum of Art, Oklahoma City, OK (February 18, 2023–May 14, 2023), Susquehanna Art Museum, Harrisburg, PA (June 10, 2023–September 10, 2023), and Figge Art Museum, Davenport, IA (October 7, 2023–January 28, 2024).

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue authored and edited by exhibition curator Turry M. Flucker, published by Hirmer. The publication features a historic overview of the college, its innovative collecting mission, and its critical role in the fight for civil rights.

Exhibition credit and support
The exhibition is co-organized by the American Federation of Arts and Tougaloo College. It is curated by Turry M. Flucker, Vice President of Collections and Partnerships at the Terra Foundation for American Art. Flucker is a graduate of Tougaloo College, and the former Director and Curator of the Tougaloo College Art Collections.

Major support for the national tour and exhibition catalogue is provided by the Robert Lehman Foundation, Inc., Henry Luce Foundation, the Mellon Foundation, and Terra Foundation for American Art.

The Amistad Center graciously thanks Millard H. and Claire M. Pryor and Family, Travelers, and The Hartford for their generous support.

Additional support for the catalogue is provided by Pass Christian Books, Elizabeth "Buffy" Easton, Sarah Van Anden, Julie McGee, and Tori and Marques Phillips.
MEDIA CONTACTS
Kimberly Kersey, Director of The Amistad Center for Art & Culture
kersey@amistadcenter.org (860)838-4089

Jessica Kelley Boucher, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art
jessica.kelley@thewadsworth.org (860)838-4081

High resolution image files to accompany publicity of this announcement are available upon request.

About The Amistad Center for Art & Culture
In 1987, a handful of visionaries that included Trustees and staff of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, joined forces with independent foundations, corporations and the State of Connecticut and formed The Amistad Foundation in order to purchase, protect and provide public access to the Randolph Linsly Simpson Collection then housed in the collector’s farmhouse in Northford, CT. This extraordinary collection, which now consists of 7,000 works of art, artifacts and archives, documents more than 300 years of the artistic, literary, military, enslaved and free life of Black Americans—truly a treasure and a rich resource of immense educational value and testimony to America’s diverse and dynamic culture. In addition to collection care and development, The Amistad Foundation was intended to take on the broader tasks of preserving and interpreting African American culture and history and correcting the misrepresentation and under-representation of this important aspect of our country’s evolution.

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’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. Current hours are noon–5pm Thursday–Sunday. 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.


###