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Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art Receives $2 Million Grant from Art Bridges Foundation for Collection-Sharing Partnership with Southern Museums

Beginning spring 2023, the Wadsworth Atheneum, Columbia Museum of Art, Mobile Museum of Art, and Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts will co-create traveling exhibitions through spring 2026

Hartford, Conn. (January 30, 2023)—The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art will share works of art and material culture from its American collections with three partner museums in the American South through the Art Bridges Cohort Program, made possible by a $2 million grant from the Art Bridges Foundation. Over the next three years, colleagues from the Wadsworth Atheneum will curate collaboratively with Columbia Museum of Art (Columbia, SC), Mobile Museum of Art (Mobile, AL), and Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts (Montgomery, AL) to co-organize a series of traveling exhibitions. Together, the four institutions will be known as the American South Consortium.

The American South Consortium is part of the Art Bridges Cohort Program, a national program committed to supporting multi-year exhibition partnerships among museums. The cohort program builds on Art Bridges’s mission to expand access to American art across the United States and to empower museums to broaden traditional definitions of American art. The Wadsworth Atheneum joins peer institutions such as the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Los Angeles County Art Museum, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art who are all leading unique cohort programs.

Paul Provost, Art Bridges CEO, stated, “Expanding access through collaboration and collection-sharing is at the heart of the Art Bridges Cohort Program, and we’re delighted to have the Wadsworth leading the American South Consortium. These four cohort partners are exploring new ways of storytelling and presenting American art and material culture from different regions of the country for their respective communities.”

“The Art Bridges Cohort Program allows us to share our exceptional American collections with wider audiences,” said Matthew Hargraves, Director, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art. “We are thrilled to welcome great objects from institutions in the American South that will expand our understanding and appreciation of the diversity of American art and material culture. This exchange resonates with the current reinterpretation of our own collection, and we are proud to be leading this effort with the generous support of Art Bridges.”
New ways to interpret American art and experiences

The exhibitions presented by the American South Consortium will explore themes that speak to our nation’s shared histories and diverse regional identities. “In addition to paintings and sculpture, the project will draw extensively upon the Wadsworth’s great examples of material culture, notably its American decorative arts and textiles collections, which represent a unique strength of our institution that dovetails with our partners’ interests,” said Erin Monroe, Krieble Curator of American Art and Sculpture at the Wadsworth.

Three years of traveling exhibitions

The project will launch in spring 2023 and conclude in early 2026. The first phase (early 2023 to 2024) will feature a series of Spotlight installations in which each partner museum presents a singular object from its collection. This format highlights the stories behind these great works through an in-depth presentation of its artistic, social, and historic contexts. Every Spotlight will be displayed at each venue. The second phase (2024 to early 2026) will be a larger, midsize exhibition shown at every venue. Currently in development, the exhibition will bring together works from each partner museum in conversation with a core group of loans from the Wadsworth’s collection.

The Spotlight series will feature objects from the nineteenth century to the contemporary moment, representing an impressive array of materials and makers, including:

- Columbia Museum of Art’s Bureau (c.1855), made by Thomas Day (1801–c.1861), demonstrates the accomplishments of a free Black cabinetmaker in the face of restrictive conditions in the pre-Civil War era.

- From the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, a dynamic story quilt by Yvonne Wells (b. 1939) highlights noted historic Alabama figure Helen Keller (2006).

- The Mobile Museum of Art will present the work of Dusti Bongé (1903–1993), a prolific female modern artist from Mississippi, though her large-scale abstract expressionist painting Distillate of the Past (Fragment of the Past) (1958).

- To expand the story of modern design, the Wadsworth will display rarely seen textiles by Alexander Calder (1898–1976) such as such as Untitled (1965), hooked by Leslie and Rufus Stillman after a design by Calder for a Breuer-designed modernist home in Connecticut, and Rasoir d’avion (1970-75), produced in France.

Columbia Museum of Art
Established in 1950, the Columbia Museum of Art (CMA) is located in the heart of downtown Columbia, SC. The CMA encompasses nearly 7,000 works and spans thousands of years of history, representing a full range of world cultures, and remains the premier art museum in the Southeast and vibrant community hub of the South Carolina Midlands.
Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts
Founded in 1930, the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) is home to over 4,000 works of art, consisting primarily of works by American artists from the 18th to the 21st centuries. The museum is located in Blount Cultural Park, a 175-acre park also home to the Alabama Shakespeare Festival and the Hannah Daye Ridling Bark Park.

Mobile Museum of Art
Since its founding in 1963, the Mobile Museum of Art (MMofA) has evolved into the only accredited art museum in south Alabama, with a collection of over 6,400 artworks comprised of contemporary craft, decorative arts, painting, sculpture, and works on paper. Located in Langan Municipal Park, outside of downtown, MMofA serves the city of Mobile as well as the coastal areas of Western Florida and Eastern Mississippi.

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, Beaux-Arts, International modern, and Brutalist—are located at 600 Main Street in Hartford, Conn.

About Art Bridges
Art Bridges is the vision of philanthropist and arts patron Alice Walton. The mission of Art Bridges is to expand access to American art in all regions across the United States. Since 2017, Art Bridges has been creating and supporting programs that bring outstanding works of American art out of storage and into communities. Art Bridges partners with a growing network of nearly 220 museums of all sizes and locations to provide financial and strategic support for exhibition development, loans from the Art Bridges collection, and programs designed to educate, inspire, and deepen engagement with local audiences. The Art Bridges Collection represents an expanding vision of American art from the nineteenth century to present day and encompasses multiple media and voices. To learn more about the Art Bridges, follow the hashtag #ArtBridges on social media and visit artbridgesfoundation.org.

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