Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art acquires important Rosalba Carriera portrait

Portrait of a Gentleman, created around 1730, is a major work by one of the most important artists of the 18th century, and the most famous female artist of her time.

HARTFORD, Conn. (July 10, 2023)—The Wadsworth Atheneum has acquired an outstanding work by Rosalba Carriera (also known as ‘Rosalba’) the most famous woman artist working in the eighteenth century and admired as a pioneering and brilliant pastellist. Portrait of a Gentleman (c. 1730), was created when she reached the height of her career, portraying the upper echelons of society with a deft hand and observational sensitivity. It is the first example of the artist’s work in the Wadsworth Atheneum’s collection.

Rosalba started her career as a miniaturist, but she became best known for her skill with pastels—her technical and artistic innovations elevating the uniquely powdery medium to great popularity among artists and collectors. Royalty, cardinals, and cognoscenti across Europe commissioned portraits and allegories from her. It quickly attracted admirers and younger followers such as Jean-Étienne Liotard and Maurice Quentin de la Tour.

“Portrait of a Gentleman is a work of rare elegance and grace—it is also an exemplary work by Rosalba. The freshness and radiance of the colors as well as the vaporous quality of the surface truly distinguish this work and lend to its liveliness. That we are as yet unable to definitively identify the sitter is secondary to the captivating beauty of this portrait,” said Oliver Tostmann, Susan Morse Hilles Curator of European Art at the Wadsworth.

First identified as the legendary art collector Pierre Crozat, and later, Louis Armand II de Bourbon, Prince de Conti, neither figure has been verified beyond a doubt. The sitter poses with torso in profile and his head positioned toward the viewer, nearly achieving contact while maintaining a slight aloofness. With his magnificent shoulder length wig, damask justaucorps coat, and splendid red vest embellished with gold embroidery and buttons, this handsome sitter was clearly someone of status and rank.
“This breathtaking portrait will greatly enrich our growing collection of works on paper. Not only is it a work of the highest quality, but it is also from the hand of the most celebrated pastellist of the eighteenth century. We are proud to welcome Portrait of a Gentleman into the Wadsworth’s collection and look forward to sharing Rosalba Carriera’s brilliance with our visitors very soon,” said Matthew Hargraves, Director of the Wadsworth Atheneum.

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.

Current hours are noon–5pm Thursday–Sunday. Berkins on Main café hours are noon–4pm Thursday–Sunday. The library is open Fridays by appointment only. Visitors are encouraged to wear a face mask/covering while exploring the galleries. 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.


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