PRESS RELEASE

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Styling Identities: Hair’s Tangled Histories opens March 21 at the Wadsworth
100+ fascinating objects tell the story of what hair means to us all.

Hartford, Conn. (February 12, 2023)—The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art presents Styling Identities: Hair’s Tangled Histories on view March 21–August 11, 2024. From ancient hair pins to contemporary art, selected objects tell stories about what hair means to us personally, culturally, and societally. A collaborative exhibition between the museum and its neighbors, Styling Identities was developed by Wadsworth staff in active partnership with Hartford community members.

“Hair, or the lack of it, is what makes humans such unusual creatures. Throughout history hair has served as both the subject and medium of art. Together with the people of Hartford, we have developed a provocative exhibition that reflects on hair and hair stories with surprising and often poignant results. I am tremendously proud of the project,” said Matthew Hargraves, Director of the Wadsworth.

In an innovative new approach, the exhibition is organized by a cross-functional team of employees from across the museum. Styling Identities addresses four main themes: Care considers hair as a means to express love for ourselves and others; Cut recognizes hair’s power as a marker of transition and change; Tangles explores stereotypes and judgments around hair; and Ties regards hair as a symbol of belonging.

Featured works are drawn chiefly from the Wadsworth’s collections and the Amistad Center for Art & Culture with selected key loans. The exhibition is global in scope, including objects originating in Africa, Asia, North and South America, and Europe, and ranging in time from antiquity to the present—highlighting a diverse selection of objects in many mediums.

Creative input and contributions from Hartford community members infuse every aspect of the exhibition. A community advisory board worked side-by-side with the museum team, responding to proposed works, and contributing stories and other creative content. An exhibition zine available in print and online, showcases personal hair stories in art, writing, photography, video, and music. A series of videos created by Hartford-based filmmaker, Pedro Bermudez, features three Hartford businesses, the patrons of Hartford barbershops and salons telling stories about their hair and what it has meant in their
lives. Labels written by community members and the curatorial team will expand the exhibition’s narratives and potential interpretations.

A statement from the Wadsworth curatorial team gratefully acknowledges these important collaborators: “At the heart of this exhibition is the idea that everyone has a hair story to tell. So many have shared their stories with us over the course of developing Styling Identities, and to them we owe our deepest gratitude. This exhibition is better because of you.”

Styling Identities is co-curated by Bethani Blake, Programs Manager for the African Diaspora; Chloe Collins, Assistant Librarian/Archivist; Denise Giannino, PhD, Docent and Tour Programs Manager; Matthew Hargraves, PhD, Director; Hamid Hemat, Hartford HealthCare Curatorial Fellow; Jama Holchin, Evaluation and Digital Interpretation Specialist; Alexis Jacqueline Martinez, Development Manager, Events and Special Programs; and Vanessa Sigalas, Dr. phil, David W. Dangremond Associate Curator for Collections Research.


About the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art
Founded in 1842, the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art is home to a collection of nearly 50,000 works of art spanning 5,000 years of human creativity with a focus on great works of European and American art from the medieval period 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.

**Hours:** 12-5pm Thursday through Sunday
**Admission:** $20 with discounts for members, students, and seniors.
**Free admission for Hartford residents** with Wadsworth Welcome registration. Advance ticket registration via thewadsworth.org is encouraged, not required.

**BMUSE Café** hours are noon–5pm Thursday–Sunday.

The Auerbach Art Library is open by appointment only, 10am–5pm Friday.

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