



WADSWORTH ATHENEUM MUSEUM OF ART

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Director's Choice Exhibition Examines Contemporary Portraiture in Photography at Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

A new exhibition, "Aspects of Portraiture: Photographs from the Wadsworth Atheneum," opens July 11 and runs through Nov. 15, 2015 at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art. The exhibition features nearly 50 works that address various approaches to photographic portraiture ranging from classical pieces by Irving Penn, Richard Avedon and Timothy Greenfield Sanders, to symbolic portraits by Patti Smith and John Coplans, to those that tell stories by artists like Adrian Piper and Carrie Mae Weems. "Aspects of Portraiture" is the final exhibition organized by Susan L. Talbott before she retires as Director and C.E.O.—a position she has held for eight years—at the end of 2015.

"Portraiture has always been a key theme for artists," said Talbott. "And today photography is the primary medium for depicting the human persona. While colossal advances in technology have changed picture-making, artists have also transformed their conceptual approach to capturing the human spirit."

The impulse to capture a person's likeness or reveal the essence of a subject's character is an artistic medium that dates back to ancient civilization. But with the camera's invention in the 19th century the popularity of portrait photography soared, and as technology advanced artists experimented with new techniques from Polaroid to Cibachrome, moving from conventional portraits to multi panel, wall sized installations. "Aspects of Portraiture" mingles unmediated traditional portraits going back to the 1940s with symbolic portrayals using objects as surrogates for human subjects, and narrative portraits, often employing a mix of images and text. Such new approaches to capturing the core of human character are well represented in the Wadsworth Atheneum's rich collection of post-war and contemporary photography, and come

together for the first time in this thoughtful survey, which examines social history, identity and race, as well as nostalgia for the traditional portraits that once defined photography.

Because of the fragility of the medium, photographs are not commonly exhibited; thus, “Aspects of Portraiture” is a rare opportunity to view a significant portion of the nearly 1,500 photographs in the museum collection. The show’s focus on alternative concepts of portraiture has long interested Talbott and was also explored in her 2011/12 exhibition, “Patti Smith: Camera Solo.” Works acquired from that exhibition are on view.

Many of the artists represented in the exhibition have participated in the museum’s MATRIX exhibition series, which celebrates its 40th anniversary this year. Another focus of the installation is the patrons who gifted the works to the Wadsworth Atheneum, with special homage to Robinson Grover, who passed away this spring. Grover and his wife Nancy enhanced the Wadsworth Atheneum’s photography collection with many donations during their long and supportive involvement with the museum.

“Aspects of Portraiture” joins three other presentations at the Wadsworth Atheneum this year focused on portraiture: “Warhol & Mapplethorpe: Guise & Dolls,” an exhibition investigating a tumultuous era of change in 1970s and 1980s New York City through the work of Andy Warhol and Robert Mapplethorpe, opening Oct. 17; an installation of rarely-exhibited 16th – 20th century portrait works on paper, opening Sept. 19 as part of the reinstallation of the museum’s European Art collections; and an installation of artists’ self-portraits in celebration of the 40th anniversary of the museum’s MATRIX program, opening late October.

Public Programs

A special evening event celebrating “Aspects of Portraiture” and featuring an intimate look at the exhibition with Talbott will take place Tuesday, July 14, from 6 – 8 p.m.; tickets (\$50) required: (860) 838-4077. Talbott will give a gallery talk titled, “Portrait Photography: Faces, Stories and Symbols,” Thursday, Sept. 24 at noon; the program is free with museum admission.

About the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

Founded in 1842, the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art is the oldest continually operating public art museum in the United States. The museum’s nearly 50,000 works of art span 5,000 years, from Greek and Roman antiquities to the first museum collection of American contemporary art. The Wadsworth Atheneum’s five connected buildings—representing architectural styles from Gothic Revival to modern International Style—are located at 600 Main

Street in Hartford, Conn. Since 2010 the museum has been undergoing a major, \$33 million renovation, and will celebrate a grand reopening Sept. 19, 2015. Hours: Wednesday – Friday: 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.; First Thursdays: 11 a.m. – 8 p.m. Admission: \$5 – 10; discounts for members, students and seniors. Free admission 4 – 5 p.m. Wednesday – Friday (except First Thursdays). Public phone: (860) 278-2670; website: thewadsworth.org.

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