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# WADSWORTH ATHENEUM MUSEUM OF ART



## History

The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art was founded in 1842 by Daniel Wadsworth, one of the first major American art patrons. The museum's collections of nearly 50,000 works of art span 5,000 years and feature the Morgan collection of Greek and Roman antiquities and European decorative arts; world-renowned baroque and surrealist paintings; an unsurpassed collection of Hudson River School landscapes; European and American Impressionist paintings; modernist masterpieces; the Serge Lifar collection of Ballets Russes drawings and costumes; the George A. Gay collection of prints; the Wallace Nutting collection of American colonial furniture and decorative arts; the Samuel Colt firearms collection; costumes and textiles; African American art and artifacts; and contemporary art.

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Thomas  
Sully,  
*Daniel  
Wadsworth*,  
1807, Oil  
on canvas,  
Gift of  
William P.  
Wadsworth,  
1976.79

Daniel Wadsworth originally planned to establish a “Gallery of Fine Arts,” but he was persuaded to create **an *atheneum*, a term popular in the 19th century used to describe a cultural institution with a library, works of art and artifacts, devoted to learning history, literature, art, and science.**

### **The Buildings**

The Wadsworth Atheneum is comprised of five connected buildings. The first was the Gothic Revival Wadsworth building of 1844, designed by the eminent architects Ithiel Town and Alexander Jackson Davis. It originally housed the art gallery, the Connecticut Historical Society, the Young Men’s Institute (which became the Hartford Public Library), and the Natural History Society. The Watkinson Library of Reference was added to the original building in the 1860s.

The Tudor Revival Colt Memorial of 1910 and the Renaissance Revival Morgan Memorial of 1910-15, designed by Benjamin Wistar Morris, provided additional space for the growing fine arts collection.

The Avery Memorial opened in 1934 and was the first American museum building with a modern International Style interior. By 1964, the institutions not affiliated with the art museum had moved to other Hartford locations.

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When the Goodwin building, designed in a late modernist style, opened to the public in 1969, the entire facility was devoted to the fine arts for the first time, Daniel Wadsworth's original intention.

### **Growth of the Collections**

The Wadsworth Atheneum's art gallery developed slowly during its early years. The collection consisted mostly of history paintings, portraits, and American landscapes by artists such as John Trumbull, Thomas Cole and Frederic Church, along with examples of Victorian sculpture.

**1889:** The Atheneum entered a period of rapid growth when the Goodwin and Morgan families spearheaded a public fundraising campaign for a renovation and expansion program, completed in 1893.

**1905:** Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt bequeathed over 1,000 objects to the museum, including paintings from the Hudson River School, decorative works, and the firearms collection of her late husband Samuel Colt, as well as funds for the construction of the Colt Memorial.

**1907:** Hartford native J. Pierpont Morgan offered to build the Morgan Memorial, and in 1917 J.P. Morgan, Jr., presented the museum with his father's collection of ancient bronzes, Renaissance majolica, 17th century ivories and silver gilt objects, and Meissen and Sevres porcelains. In 1926 Morgan purchased for the Wadsworth Atheneum the preeminent Wallace Nutting collection of American "Pilgrim Century" furniture and decorative arts.

**1927:** The bequest of Frank C. Sumner established the Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection fund, in memory of his wife and sister-in-law. This fund continues to enrich the museum's holdings by enabling it to purchase paintings of the highest quality. The Wadsworth Atheneum was the first American museum to acquire works by Caravaggio, Miró, Mondrian, Balthus, Harnett, Cornell, and Dalí.

### **Wadsworth Atheneum Director Highlights**

The modern history of the Wadsworth Atheneum began in 1927 with the appointment of **A. Everett "Chick" Austin, Jr.**, as director. During his 17 year tenure, Austin founded the museum's collection of European paintings, focusing particularly on the baroque field, and acquired masterpieces by leading modernists. He also introduced other emerging art forms that were new to museums at the time—music, dance, theater, film, and photography. Austin's former Hartford home, the [Austin House](#), is the largest object in the museum's collection and a National Historic Landmark.

In the 1930s under Austin's leadership, the Wadsworth Atheneum presented America's first major Italian Baroque exhibition, its first Surrealist show, and its first comprehensive Picasso retrospective. In 1933 Austin sponsored choreographer George Balanchine's immigration to America, whose company would later become the [New York City Ballet](#). Gertrude Stein, Virgil Thomson, Salvador Dalí, Alexander Calder, Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, Martha Graham, and Agnes de Mille were among the famous figures that Austin brought to Hartford.

**Charles C. Cunningham**, director from 1946 to 1966, enriched the Italian, Spanish and Northern baroque collection with works by artists such as Panini, Zurbarán, Ribera, and Hals. He built the French Impressionist collection with major works by Monet, Renoir, and Pissarro, added to the holdings of English art with Turner, Wright of Darby, Holman Hunt, and Stanley Spencer, and expanded the American collection with paintings by Homer, Inness, Eakins and Wyeth. He established professional

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curatorial standards and nearly quadrupled the staff, creating the offices of Education and Membership, and the Department of Costumes and Textiles.

In 1966 **James Elliot** became director and during his 10 year tenure developed the contemporary collection in particular, presenting innovative programs of theater, music, and dance. In 1975 he founded the MATRIX program of focused exhibitions, performances and lectures, reflecting diverse trends in contemporary art. The MATRIX program has showcased the work – often for the first time in a museum – of more than 150 emerging artists, many of which are well-known today, and has inspired over 50 similar programs at art museums across the country.

Between 1977 and 1987, director **Tracy Atkinson** focused on a renovation of the buildings and an increase in gallery space. The museum produced larger, more frequent special exhibitions and publications. Under Atkinson, the Wadsworth Atheneum helped establish the Amistad Foundation, now the Amistad Center for Art & Culture, a sister organization and a repository of African American art and artifacts. In 1985 the museum also acquired Chick Austin's extraordinary Palladian house, known as the Austin House.

**Patrick McCaughey** became director in 1988 and served until 1996. He appointed the first Curator of African American Art, acquired important European and American works, and oversaw the redesign of the main lobby with wall drawings by Sol LeWitt. McCaughey dramatically increased the museum's international audience, sending large portions of its permanent collection for exhibition to Paris and Japan, as well as launching and supporting the first major Australian-American landscape show.

**Peter C. Sutton**, named director in 1996, created the first monographic exhibition of the Dutch master Pieter de Hooch in 1999. He launched a series of exhibitions inspired by the permanent collection that combined originality with broad popular appeal, including *Dali's Optical Illusions*. These continued well beyond his tenure. The museum expanded its collections with works ranging from Old Masters to Pop Art.

**Kate Sellers** served as director from 2000 to 2003, when the museum contemplated a large-scale physical expansion while ground-breaking exhibitions continued, notably *The Impressionists at Argenteuil*, the most popular show in the museum's history.

**Willard Holmes**, appointed director in 2003, continued the exploration of additional museum space, while large portions of the museum's American and European collections traveled throughout the United States and Europe to unprecedented acclaim.

**Susan L. Talbott** became the Atheneum's director in 2008. During her tenure she developed new programs and exhibitions that were both engaging and intellectually exciting, expanded the collections through significant acquisitions, and spearheaded the Community Engagement Initiative. The largest project overseen by Talbott was a \$33 million renovation of the museum's campus, restoring its buildings to their historical splendor and completely reinstalling the museum's collections of Post-War art, Contemporary art, European art, and European decorative arts.

**Thomas J. Loughman** is the current Director and CEO at the Wadsworth Atheneum. Arriving in early 2016, he has already changed the conversation about the museum's role in Hartford, launching Wadsworth Welcome, a free access program for city residents that emphasizes the message that the museum belongs to the Atheneum's most immediate neighbors. Prior to coming to Hartford, he served

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as the Associate Director at Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts, (2008-2016) as well as in a variety of curatorial, research, and teaching roles in the field. A highlight of Dr. Loughman's past work is his organization of the 2010-2014 global tour of the Clark's core collection.

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## Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

### Chronology

1771 Daniel Wadsworth is born on August 8.

1775 George Washington visits Jeremiah Wadsworth at his home in Hartford, on the site of what would become the Wadsworth Atheneum. Washington will visit the house twice more: with Rochambeau, Hamilton and Lafayette in 1780; and while president in 1789.

1783 Jeremiah Wadsworth and his son, Daniel, visit the London studio of John Trumbull, who paints a double portrait of them.

1793 The Louvre opens in Paris as a national museum.

1807 The Boston Athenaeum, a private institution, is founded.

1807 Thomas Sully visits Wadsworth and paints portraits of him and his family.

1809 Wadsworth finishes Monte Video, his country estate in what is now Avon. It is the first Gothic revival

house in New England.

1826- Wadsworth is a principal patron of Thomas Cole.

1828

1838 The National Gallery in London opens.

1841 Wadsworth turns 70 and offers the family property on Main Street as the site for a Gallery of Fine Arts.

Others convince him to create an Atheneum that would also include other established institutions: The Connecticut Historical Society; The Young Men's Institute (the forerunner of the Hartford Public Library); and The Natural History Society of Hartford. By December 1, 133 subscribers had pledged \$31,730.72.

1842 The Wadsworth Atheneum, America's first public art museum, is incorporated by the State of Connecticut, and construction begins.

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1844 The Atheneum, designed by Ithiel Town and Alexander Jackson Davis, opens to the public with over

eighty works of art on view. They include John Trumbull's Revolutionary War paintings, Thomas Cole's

*Mount Aetna*, and Sir Thomas Lawrence's portrait of Benjamin West. The admission fee is 25¢.

1846 The Smithsonian Institution is founded in Washington, D.C.

1846 Frederic Church, a Hartford native and Thomas Cole's only student, sells the Atheneum its first painting,

*Hooker and Company*, depicting the founding of Hartford.

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1848 Daniel Wadsworth dies, and his personal collection of paintings comes to the Atheneum.

1855 The subscribers to the Atheneum, also called proprietors, turn over to the corporation of the Atheneum all

of their individual rights to the holdings of the Gallery, giving the Trustees full control.

1858 The sculptor Edward Sheffield Bartholomew dies in Rome. He was from Connecticut, and spent two

years, beginning in 1845, as an employee of the Atheneum, hired to mind the Gallery, and known as either the keeper or the curator. After his death, the Atheneum raises funds to purchase sculptures from his studio. James G. Batterson, founder of the New England Granite Works and The Travelers Insurance Company, is chosen to travel to Italy and secure Bartholomew's works. They are all installed, including *Eve Repentant*, by 1861.

1864 The Watkinson Library addition is completed, but not opened to the public until 1866. David Watkinson

had left \$100,000 to the Atheneum for his proposed reference library in 1857.

1870 The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston are founded.

1884 The Trustees vote to close the Gallery to the public for want of funds. An editorial in the *Hartford Courant* berates the citizens of Hartford for not supporting the Atheneum. "What they pay for is a good lively minstrel show at the opera house or some other similarly permanent and enduring means of entertainment. And so we go on year by year, young people growing up by thousands in the city and their

characters shaping themselves under the prevailing influences; and the prevailing influences seem to be those which close libraries and art galleries and open doors that lead to different places of entertainment."

1886 The Gallery is reopened after The Art Society of Hartford, recently incorporated, enters into an agreement

with the Atheneum. The Society will underwrite the Gallery, free of charge to the public, and in return the

Trustees will allow the Society to hold art classes in the Gallery.

1889 The Rev. Francis Goodwin tells his cousin, Hartford native J. Pierpont Morgan, that the "Atheneum and

its semi-affiliated institutions must either be revived or else decently buried." In London, Goodwin has

a similar conversation with Morgan's father, Junius Spencer Morgan, who responds with a pledge of \$100,000. J. Pierpont Morgan then pledges \$50,000. In this first appeal for public funds since the founding of the Atheneum, over \$400,000 is raised for the renovation.

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1893 The refurbished Atheneum and adjoining new building for the Watkinson Library opens to the public. J.

Cleveland Cady is the architect.

1893– The Henry and Walter Keney Fund, of \$50,000, is established as the Atheneum’s first endowment for the

1896 purchase of works of art.

1897 The Atheneum trustees appoint George H. Story, Curator of the Painting Department at the Metropolitan

Museum of Art in New York City, as the “Honorary Curator of the Art Gallery.” For the next twenty-five

years, he will be a major voice in selecting paintings for the museum.

1904 A section of Daniel Wadsworth’s house on Prospect Street is opened as the museum’s Annex gallery. The

house, built by Jeremiah Wadsworth for Daniel in 1795, had been purchased by the Watkinson Library in

1858, rented to various organizations, transferred to the Atheneum in 1890, leased to the Hartford Club for some years, and then renovated to house a part of the Hartford Public Library, the Hartford Art Society, and the Annex gallery. The building will be demolished in 1932 to make way for the Avery Memorial.

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1905 Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt, widow of Samuel Colt and a founding member of the Art Society of Hartford,

dies, leaving her art collection to the Atheneum, and \$50,000 for a new building to house it.

1907 J. Pierpont Morgan, who had been quietly buying property adjacent to the Atheneum for some years,

proposes building the Junius Spencer Morgan Memorial, and pledges \$500,000 for the construction, though it will eventually cost him over \$750,000. The architect for this, and the Colt Memorial, is Benjamin Wistar Morris, son-in-law of the Rev. Francis Goodwin.

1910 The Colt Memorial and the Main Street section of the Morgan Memorial are officially open to the public.

1911 Frank Butler Gay is appointed the first director of the Atheneum. He had begun working there in the

library in 1876, and through successive years was named Superintendent of the Building (1883–1907), Custodian of the Gallery (1908), and Curator (1909–1911). In 1897 he had become the Librarian of the Watkinson Library, as well.

1915 The remainder of the Morgan Memorial, including the great hall, is completed and opened to the public.

1917 J. P. Morgan, Jr., presents the Atheneum—per his father’s will—with more than 1,300 objects from J.

Pierpont Morgan’s collection of decorative arts.

1918 Florence Paull Berger, the first professionally trained museum staff member, is hired as the Atheneum’s

General Curator. She begins the process of cataloguing the entire collection.

1918 Samuel P. Avery, Jr., gives the Atheneum \$225,000 for a new building. Funds will triple by 1932 when

construction on the Avery Memorial begins.

1922 The Atheneum issues the first museum *Bulletin*.

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1926 The Wallace Nutting Collection of Pilgrim Century Furniture is purchased for the Atheneum by J. P.

Morgan, Jr. It had been installed in the museum the previous year.

1927 Over \$1 million from the estate of Frank C. Sumner is left to the Atheneum for the purchase of “choice

paintings.” Sumner made the bequest, in part, to honor the wishes of his elder brother, George G. Sumner,

who had made a provisional bequest in his own will twenty-one years earlier. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund memorializes both men’s wives. This is still the primary acquisition fund of the museum.

1927 A. Everett Austin, Jr., becomes director.

1929 Austin exhibits contemporary French masters, including Braque, Matisse and Picasso, and shows motion

pictures in the museum for the first time.

1929 The Museum of Modern Art is founded in New York.

1930 The Atheneum presents America’s first Italian Baroque exhibition.

1930 Austin and his bride, Helen Goodwin Austin, move into their newly built house on Scarborough Street in

Hartford. Now the largest object in the Atheneum’s collection, the Austin House will be designated a National Historic Landmark in 1994.

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1931 Austin stages the first Surrealist exhibition in America, and purchases a small painting by Salvador Dali,

the first work by the artist to enter an American museum.

1933 At the urging of Lincoln Kirstein, the Atheneum sponsors George Balanchine’s emigration to America to

found the School of American Ballet. They soon move to New York, but the first public performance of what will become the New York City Ballet is in the theater of the Avery Memorial in December 1934.

1933 Austin purchases the Serge Lifar Collection of designs for Diaghliev’s Ballets Russes.

1934 The Avery Memorial wing, with the first International Style museum interior, opens with the nation’s first

comprehensive Picasso exhibition, and the premiere of the Gertrude Stein–Virgil Thomson opera, *Four Saints in Three Acts*, the first American opera with an all-black cast. The architect for the building is Robert O’Connor, from the same firm as built the Morgan Memorial, although Austin made extensive contributions to the design of the interior.

1934 A thematic, multi-week film series, “The Motion Picture, 1914–1924,” is shown in the Avery Theater.

1935 Austin selects *Composition in Blue and White* while visiting Mondrian’s studio in France. The painting is

in the Abstract Art exhibition at the Atheneum that fall, and the museum pays for the work, the first Mondrian to enter the collection of an American museum, the following year.

1936 Austin stages the Hartford Festival, a week-long celebration of the arts that features an exhibition of

almost 400 paintings from Hartford collectors, a retrospective of early film, a Satie symphonic drama with a set by Alexander Calder, a Balanchine ballet, and a Stravinsky chorale. It culminates with the grand

Paper Ball, with designs by Pavel Tchelitchew.

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1941 The National Gallery of Art is opened in Washington, D.C.

1943 The Atheneum acquires Caravaggio's *Ecstasy of St. Francis*, the first American museum purchase of a Caravaggio.

1944 The Goodwin Parlor, from the Major James Goodwin house on Woodland Street in Hartford, is installed in the Morgan Memorial. It will be renovated in 1990.

1944 Chick Austin resigns, and Florence Paull Berger becomes acting director.

1945 Frank Lloyd Wright designs Guggenheim Museum.

1946 Charles C. Cunningham becomes director. He will establish curatorships, departments, and auxiliary organizations that will modernize the administration of the Atheneum

1949 Cunningham begins the summer intern program.

1950 The Women's Committee is founded.

1950 The Connecticut Historical Society leaves the Wadsworth Atheneum, moving to new headquarters.

1951 Cunningham purchases Zurbaran's masterpiece *Saint Serapion*. He will continue to acquire exceptional paintings and objects that broaden the Atheneum's collections.

1952 The Watkinson Library leaves the Wadsworth Atheneum, becoming a part of Trinity College.

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1956 The Hartford Public Library leaves the Wadsworth Atheneum, and reopens in its new building in early 1957.

1957 The Atheneum receives a bequest of fourteen paintings, including works by Renoir, Monet and Degas, from Anne Parrish Titzell, who lived in Connecticut and was known primarily as an author of children's books.

1958 The first museum handbook is published.

1964 The ground-breaking exhibition, *Black, White and Grey*, is organized by Samuel J. Wagstaff, Jr., the

Curator of Paintings, Prints, and Drawings, and includes works by Jasper Johns, Ellsworth Kelly, Robert Rauschenberg, Tony Smith, Frank Stella, and Andy Warhol.

1964 The Hartford Art School leaves the Atheneum, moving to the campus of the University of Hartford. In

1956, it had joined with Hillyer College and The Hartt School of Music to form the University.

1965 Work on the James Lippincott Goodwin Building begins, along with the complete reconstruction of the

interiors of the Wadsworth and Colt buildings. The architectural firm is Huntington, Darbee and Dollard of Hartford. The Watkinson Library building is demolished.

1966 Charles C. Cunningham leaves the Atheneum.

1966 James Elliott is appointed director.

1966 The Paper Dress Ball is held at the Atheneum. Participating designers included Bill Blass, Rudi Gernreich and Peter Max.

1968 The museum is closed in order to complete the new construction.

1968 The Docent Council is organized. Classes to train docents begin in January 1969.

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1969 The Atheneum reopens. For the first time, all the museum buildings are devoted to the exhibition of art.

1972 The Lions Gallery of the Senses, a tactile gallery conceived for the blind, opens. Its mission expands to

offer all visitors a way to use their other senses for aesthetic discovery. The last exhibition in the gallery will be MATRIX 106, in 1989.

1973 Alexander Calder's *Stegosaurus* is installed on the Burr McManus Mall, adjacent to the Atheneum. Although it is not the property of the museum, the Atheneum did have a major role in choosing and approving the sculpture.

1974 The first Festival of Trees is held.

1975 MATRIX, a changing exhibition program of contemporary art, begins with works by Ellsworth Kelly. Sol

LeWitt designs the opening poster and is the third MATRIX artist. MATRIX remains a forum for art that

is challenging, current, and sometimes controversial.

1976 James Elliott resigns as director.

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1977 Tracy Atkinson is appointed director. He will oversee the modernization of the Atheneum buildings,

including new heating and air-conditioning, rewiring, and a state-of-the-art security system. Coupled with

the capital improvements is "Project Iceberg"—a reinstallation of the renovated and new galleries, which

will bring thousands of objects from storage to join the mere fifteen percent of the collection that had been on view.

1981 The Society of Daniel Wadsworth is created.

1981 The Auerbach Library Associates are organized.

1982 Fine Arts and Flowers begins.

1983 The first Goodwin Medal is awarded to Genevieve H. Goodwin.

1984 The Costume and Textile Society is formed.

1985 *The Great River: Art and Society of the Connecticut Valley, 1630–1820* celebrates the culture and artistic

heritage of the Connecticut River Valley. It is one of the most expansive exhibitions ever held at the Atheneum, with 375 art objects and artifacts.

1985 The Austin House and most of its contents are given to the Atheneum by Helen Austin and her children.

1987 Tracy Atkinson retires as director.

1988 Patrick McCaughey becomes director.

1988 The Simpson Collection of African-American art and artifacts is acquired by the Amistad Foundation and

placed on deposit at the Atheneum.

1989 *200 Years of American Painting: From the Collection of the Wadsworth Atheneum* is exhibited in Paris to

celebrate the bicentennial of the French Revolution. It is the first major international exhibition of the Atheneum's collection. In 1991–1992 another major group of Atheneum paintings will tour Japan.

1989 *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment*, the nationally controversial exhibition, is shown at the Atheneum, drawing enormous crowds.

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1990 The Douglas Tracy Smith and Dorothy Potter Smith Fund, with a capital sum of \$5.7 million, is vested in the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving with the Atheneum receiving 90% of the income for the sole purpose of acquiring works of art.

1990 The Martin Office of Museum Education opens.

1992 The Decorative Arts Council is founded.

1992 The Wadsworth Atheneum celebrates the 150th anniversary of its founding with the exhibition and catalogue, *The Spirit of Genius*.

1995 The Helen and Harry Gray Court is dedicated, marking the complete renovation of the interior of the

Wadsworth Building. The Sol LeWitt wall drawing is installed in the court the following year.

1996 Patrick McCaughey resigns.

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1996 Peter Sutton is hired as director.

1998 *New Worlds From Old: 19th Century Australian & American Landscapes*, jointly organized by the Atheneum and the National Gallery of Australia, opens at the Atheneum after being shown at two venues

in Australia. It is the first exhibition to compare and contrast the landscape traditions of the two nations.

1998 A painting by Jacopo Zucchi, which had been bought in good faith by the Atheneum but subsequently

found to have been stolen during World War II, is returned to the Italian government. In return the Atheneum is loaned works from Rome that form the basis for the exhibition, *Caravaggio and His Italian Followers*.

2000 The exhibition, *Salvador Dali's Optical Illusions*, breaks attendance records. It is the first of a series of

exhibitions built around a painting in the museum's permanent collection. Others will include *The Impressionists at Argenteuil* (which set a new attendance record), *Gauguin's "Nirvana,"* and *Picasso: The Artist's Studio*.

2000 Peter Sutton steps down as director.

2000 Kate Sellers becomes the new director.

2000 Plans are begun to make major architectural changes to the museum that will involve the replacement of

the Goodwin Building with a new structure, which will stretch from Atheneum Square North to Burr Mall.

2002 Because the new building program will require the museum be closed for an extended period, arrangements are made to send major portions of the Surrealist, Modern, Old Masters, and Hudson River School collections on tour.

2003 Kate Sellers leaves the Atheneum.

2003 Willard Holmes is hired as director.

2003 The renovation plans are halted, the Atheneum remains open, but the collection tours continue as scheduled. The paintings from all the traveling collections will return by the end of 2007.

2004 A Sol LeWitt wall drawing is installed in the grand staircase of the Morgan Memorial.

2005 The Hartford Times Building on Prospect Street, behind the museum, is leased from the state, to be used

by the Atheneum for public space and administrative offices.

2007 Willard Holmes resigns.

2007 The lease on The Hartford Times Building is terminated.

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2008 Susan Talbott is hired as director and CEO. She launches the Community Engagement Initiative.  
2008 Galleries in the museum's historic Morgan Memorial Building are closed due to leaks and structural concerns and the museum prepares to undergo a 5-year, \$33 million renovation.