

# THE TATTOO

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## An arsenal of art at the Atheneum

By **JOE KEO and KATIE JORDAN**  
The Tattoo

Imagine a place where a sculpture is carved from human bones, ghosts peer out of paintings, and unseen people watch every move you make. It may sound spooky, but it really isn't.

The Wadsworth Atheneum, a well-known art museum in Hartford, has all that and more.

It sounds like a nerdy place to hang out. You may think any place called an Atheneum — a center of knowledge, named for the Greek goddess Athena — is only fit for a boring field trip.

Here, again, you haven't got the whole story. The Wadsworth is worth a visit, and it's far from boring.

Step through the revolving doors and breathe in the scent of art. There isn't actually a distinct odor to art. It's really the smell of paint, chemicals, canvas, and the fancy perfumes worn by the museum's many employees.

Stop still in your tracks, take a look around, and take in the spaciousness of this renowned arsenal of art. The Wadsworth experience begins with your first steps inside its walls.

The Wadsworth is home to many famous pieces of art and includes works from all over the world. Visitors can see Pablo Picasso's cubism, French impressionism, Renaissance masterpieces and modern and contemporary work. They've got Alexander Calder's wild sculptures and even an Egyptian mummy.

Many of the works are elegant and masterfully created. Others stir the imagination and cause you to scratch your head.

There's a sculpture of miniature furniture, each piece only centimeters tall. They stand piled one on top of another in a glass case. It seems rather bland — until the docent reveals that each piece is made of human bones that the artist bought off the black market.

The fun doesn't end there.

Eerie ghost faces gaze at bypassing visitors from within several paintings. These aren't stereotypical spirits, but rather artists' mistakes — images that were painted over, but have become dimly visible over time.

Don't monkey around or lean against any of the exhibits or sculptures, because the observant unseen people are watching constantly, making sure you don't touch or damage anything. They're security guards, and the Wadsworth

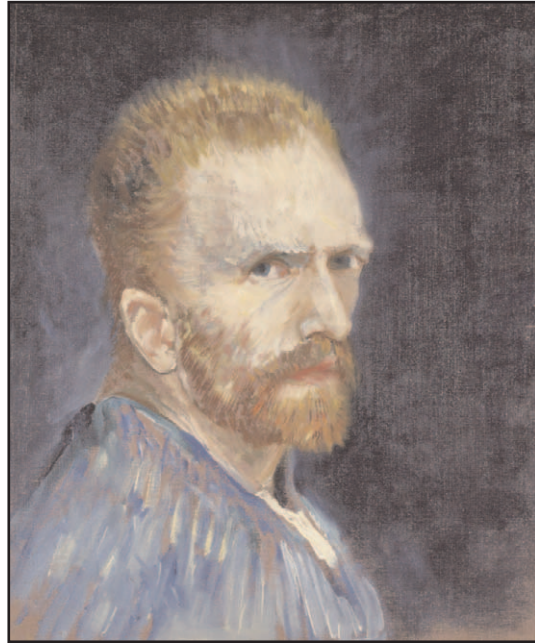


Photo courtesy of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art  
*Self-Portrait, Vincent Van Gogh*

Atheneum needs a lot of them, with all the famous and valuable art pieces in its collection.

Although you may not recognize all of the paintings at the Wadsworth, there will be some

familiar faces peeking out from frames.

Vincent Van Gogh's famous self-portrait looks out from one wall, his signature brushstrokes in varying shades of reds and blues. He resides humbly in a corner, with no presumptuous or showy display.

Near Van Gogh hangs *Nymphaea, Water Lilies*, the peaceful painting of water lilies floating on a reflective pool. Anyone can see why this beautiful piece by Claude Monet is so beloved.

One of the most famous works in the Wadsworth is *The Ecstasy of Saint Francis*, painted by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. In it, the saint lies in the darkness with his eyes on a radiant, beautiful angel.

*The Lady of Shalott*, painted by Holman Hunt, stands horrified by her broken mirror, grieving over Sir Lancelot.

Massive battle paintings in a great red hall portray famous generals from the American Revolution, many done by renowned Connecticut painter John Trumbull.

The Wadsworth offers some pretty offbeat attractions, too.

If conceptualism and contemporary art is your cup of tea, the Atheneum has what you're looking for, with three-dimensional pop-out paintings and splatters of paint on canvas.

At the Wadsworth, art lovers can observe a piece and try to interpret the artist's meaning. Whether it is an original Alexander Calder sculpture or someone's umbrella leaned against a wall, everything inside the walls of the museum is art.

But once you kick that crumpled paper bag outside the Wadsworth's doors, art becomes nothing but mere street litter.

The Atheneum's array of contemporary art allows visitors to have fun, expand their imaginations and step out of the box for a few hours.

Visitors will be scratching their heads while looking at Salvador Dali's surrealist pieces or

just admiring the walls of Sol LeWitt's ingenious creations. Given the intense scratching involved with some of the works, it's unbelievable no one has ever become bald.

**The Wadsworth is worth a visit.**

The Wadsworth Atheneum is also a treasure chest of pure American art. Artists such as Andy Warhol, Georgia O'Keeffe and Norman Rockwell bring energy, beauty and humor to the world. Rockwell's *Girl with Shiner* portrays an all-American experience — a girl outside a principal's office with a black eye.

The museum pleases the homegrown American art taste along with the international. If wandering on your own gets you lost, the docents, or guides, are very helpful. Knowledgeable guides point out quirks and interesting stories about paintings and their artists.

When your art cravings are nearly satisfied, step through the revolving glass doors and back onto Hartford's busy streets. Alongside the graffiti, street signs and billboards, the Wadsworth even offers art outdoors.

Be careful and don't walk into the path of the red-orange stegosaurus. Don't worry — dinosaurs are extinct, but Calder resurrected *Stegosaurus* out of tall steel frames and rafters.

Not far from *Stegosaurus* is a large rusty steel girder. It looks like a neglected city repair project, but in reality it's *Untitled* by Robert Morris, a work of art.

Enter the Wadsworth with an appetite for art, sample its visual smorgasboard and you'll leave pleasantly stuffed.

## American art: weird, wild, wonderful

By **JOE KEO and KATIE JORDAN**  
The Tattoo

Put aside that American history textbook and experience the nation's past through art.

The New Britain Museum of American Art is the perfect place to start. American history is expressed in the museum's collection, and visitors will see every aspect of the national identity from the weird to the wild.

Back in colonial times, untrained folk artists painted flat and pale portraits of wealthy and educated Americans. The aristocrats posed stiffly and looked moody. Baby faces resembled those of middle-aged men — imagine someone's father wearing a bib (talk about creepy). These artists could have used some art classes.

Moving on through the museum's corridors, painter Winslow Homer's *Skirmish in the Wilderness* recreates a scene out of the Civil War. The painting is almost completely dark, except for a few soldiers standing in a spot of light. The darkness surrounding them conceals lurking enemies — with every moment spent gazing into the forest, the enemy force seems to grow as more and more hidden soldiers are found. The image is so exciting and action-packed that it sends chills down the spine.

The world of American impressionism is well represented in the museum, with works by Mary Cassatt and Childe Hassam. Their visible brushstrokes and cool color schemes will put onlookers right into the painted fields and everyday American lives depicted on the

canvas.

Impressionism wasn't always popular. These paintings and other unconventional pieces were initially assailed by art critics.

### The New Britain Museum of American Art

The critics even dubbed some styles of art "ash can" because they thought the crazy new style was nothing but worthless trash.

They thought wrong. These pieces of so-called "trash" eventually became well-respected and legitimate works of art, which now hang in a room at the New Britain Museum of American Art called the "Ash Can Gallery."

This treasure chest of unique art includes pointillism, comic-style pieces and anything else that was unconventional at the time.

As history progressed, so did the variety of the museum's collection. Traditional American art evolved into some of the country's wildest displays of contemporary work. It's always the strange and intriguing that reels in the visitors.

Everyone knows of Jackson Pollock's famous splatter paintings. You would swear someone just went nuts and dripped cans of different colored paints onto a canvas — which is basically what he did.

At the New Britain museum, visitors can see *Yielding*, a splatter painting by artist Sam Francis.

Conceptualist artist Sol LeWitt's work

hangs in a nearby gallery. Geometric, symmetric, and eccentric all describe his style.

LeWitt himself didn't actually create these pieces — just the ideas behind them. He wrote up directions for each piece, and whoever bought the art was really buying the directions to create it. The buyer had to put it together.

The 20th century gallery is bursting with all kinds of intriguing art — and there's no art more intriguing than surrealism. This style is an exciting, sometimes unsettling, peek into the world of the bizarre minds of artists.

Peter Blume's *Boulders of Avila* is a sort of fantasy landscape almost entirely devoted to huge, unrealistic, cartoon-like rocks, above which swirls a purple-blue sky.

In George Tooker's *Birdwatchers*, the artist poses a group of bird watchers reverently beneath a tree, in an artistic parody of religious paintings. The somewhat comic piece is also disturbing because all of the 12 men and women in the painting have the same face.

After that, you think you've seen it all. Think again.

After awhile the definition of art seems to break all boundaries.

But maybe it's not that the creators and lovers of contemporary art see art where it doesn't exist — maybe some people are over-looking art where it does exist.

Maybe art is everywhere. It all depends on how you look at it.

Just like history, art is open to interpretation.



Joe KEO / The Tattoo

## Hill-Stead makes a good impression

By **JOE KEO and KATIE JORDAN**  
The Tattoo

When you're in technology-overload, let go of the remote, turn off the cell phone, and do something that doesn't involve double-clicking. Escape to the Hill-Stead Museum and enjoy its architecture and impressive art collection.

Visitors to the Hill-Stead Museum in Farmington get a break from the noisy modern world and have a chance to think. The name Hill-Stead sounds like a convalescent home, but it's actually a snazzy house and art museum.

The Hill-Stead offers an intimate and quiet atmosphere where visitors can dig deep into their imaginations and dive into the landscapes, seascapes, and skylines of the impressionist paintings on display.

Unlike other museums that loan out art, or show temporary exhibits, the Hill-Stead's collection is permanent.

Stepping into the Hill-Stead is like walking back in time. The musty

house — a National Historic Landmark — is unchanged and offers a fascinating view of life in the early 1900s.

At first sight the Hill-Stead looks like an opulent colonial house, but it contains much more than just antique fixtures and furniture. The Hill-Stead's fine art collection also packs a punch.

Alongside famous masterpieces the Hill-Stead offers a nonconformist twist for the rebellious teenage audience as well.

Architect Theodate Pope, the daughter of wealthy industrialist Alfred Pope, designed the sprawling farm.

Within its walls hangs a beautiful family scene by painter Mary Cassatt, a renowned American impressionist.

Art and architecture were male-dominated fields, but both Cassatt and Theodate Pope pushed the envelope and are now part of the museum's appeal.

The Hill-Stead's entire impressionist collection was once considered too radical and not worthy of being called art. But this didn't stop Alfred Pope from buying these unorthodox paintings that he loved.

The times eventually caught up with Alfred Pope's tastes and the Hill-Stead is now revered as an exclusive home to many fine works.

Artists are storytellers who communicate with colors, light, and shapes. Visitors can enjoy the adventure of looking deeper into paintings and uncovering the intentions of the artists.

Paintings of daily chores and out-

door scenes may seem like boring subjects, but it's how the artist portrays these images on canvas that makes them attractive to the eye.

In *The Tub*, Edgar Degas captures the beauty of a woman in the simple act of cleaning her tub.

Another Degas piece, *Dancers in Pink*, pictures ballerinas in pink leotards. In this backstage view, it's a tiny speck of gold on a dancer's earring that shines out and takes your eyes hostage.

Impressionism is the style of painting where artists focus on lighting and atmosphere instead of the exact details of the subject. This style of art is based on the use of visible brushstrokes that create an impression.

Perhaps the most stunning of all the paintings in the Hill-Stead is a pair by Claude Monet, *Grainstacks, White Frost Effect* and *Grainstacks in Bright Sunlight*. They're two views of haystacks in a field, but the contrast between them is amazing.

In *White Frost Effect*, soft cool shades of violet and blue create a feeling of a calm evening. In the other, Monet used his choice of colors to create the strong light and warmth of a sunny field so perfectly that standing near it, you can almost feel the heat. That painting may make you long to step outside into the sun.

When you do step outside, you'll find the Hill-Stead's beautiful Sunken Garden, where flowers bloom in abundance in spring, poets recite their works each summer and where leaves work

wonders with their own palettes each fall.

The colors of nature's painting are so bright and invigorating that you may even be inspired to create some art of your own.

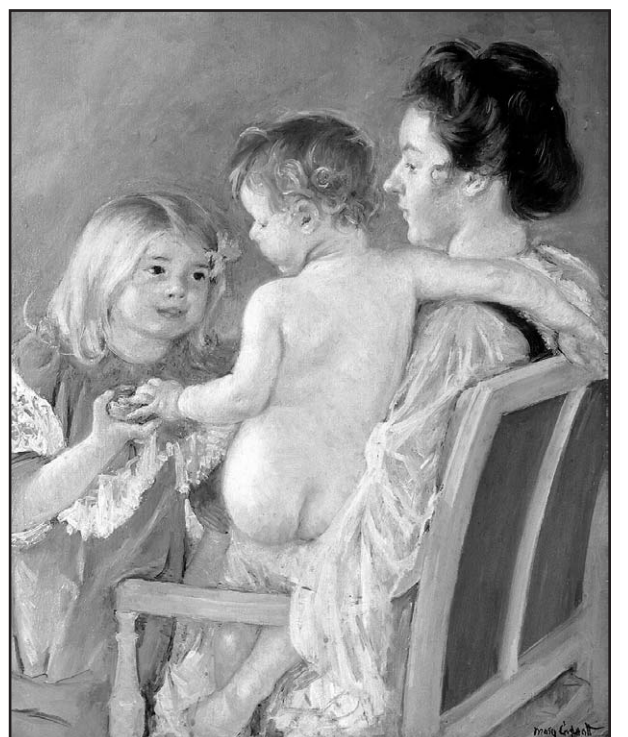
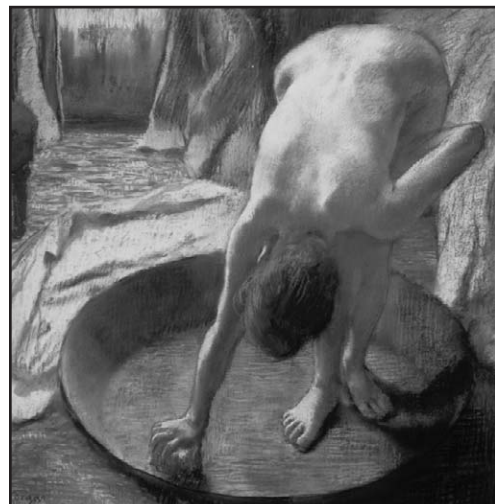
Or, if you prefer, you can stand quietly and just enjoy the peace of a place where time stands still.

Take in the vast sky and rolling plains and let the Hill-Stead make an impression on you.

Right: *Sara Handing a Toy to the Baby*, by Mary Cassatt.

Below: *The Tub*, by Edgar Degas

Photos courtesy of the Hill-Stead Museum



Joe KEO and Katie Jordan in the Sunken Garden at the Hill-Stead Museum.  
Tattoo photo

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