

PROJECT SUMMARY

Project Description: The Wadsworth Atheneum re-opened in September, 2015 after completing a stunning \$33 million restoration of this National Register complex of five interconnected buildings. The components of this effort included the re-lighting of the gallery spaces, restoring interior architectural features, repurposing space for the display of art, improving wayfinding, and re-presenting of the Atheneum's renowned collection. Prior to this the Atheneum undertook major exterior repairs and restorations of its buildings' "envelopes". Two major achievements were the reopening and restoring of the skylights and laylights in the Morgan building, and relocating mechanical equipment to the roof of the Goodwin Building allowing 6,000 sq. ft. of interior space to be re-purposed for gallery use. Other projects included a climate controlled storage area in the basement, which freed up space in the Morgan Building for gallery use, and installing a new energy efficient central heating and cooling plant.

Today the Wadsworth Atheneum is a transformed institution fully refurbished with new and expanded galleries displaying more of its collection than ever before to a re-energized public. It arrived at this point both by choice and necessity; being good stewards of its buildings, and making this museum first serve the purpose of presenting art.

Historical Significance: With the construction of the Wadsworth Building in 1842, the Wadsworth Atheneum became the nation's first free public art museum. Built in the Gothic Revival style with its twin towers and crenellated parapet, it holds a dominant presence on Main Street. It was followed in 1906 with the Colt Memorial Building designed in medieval style; then the Morgan Memorial in the Beaux Arts style in 1911 and 1917; Avery Memorial, one of the first early modern buildings in the nation in 1934 in the International Style; and the late modernist Goodwin Building constructed in 1968 in the Brutalist Style. Each building is representative of an architectural style, and chronicles the social, economic and cultural forces that shaped Hartford.

Challenges: Once one of the most vibrant and important cultural institutions in the state, the Wadsworth Atheneum had fallen on hard times. Buildings had deteriorated and appeared tired and shabby, finances were depleted, attendance had declined, and even its magnificent collection was at risk. The challenge defined the solution. It was the preservation solution. Rather than pursue a "starchitect" designed new facility (that it couldn't afford), it choose to fix what it had.

Importance: The importance of this renovation is both local and national. It represents a reassertion of the power of preservation as a force for urban revitalization. For Hartford and Connecticut the Wadsworth Atheneum "is back". And with a weather tight building, and fully renovated interiors with more gallery space than ever before, it can display in stunning fashion its magnificent collection with ample gallery space for visiting exhibitions.