



Boston Athenæum Receives \$75,000 from the Terra Foundation for American Art to Reinstall Special Collections

Boston, MA — June 21, 2021 —The Terra Foundation for American Art has awarded \$75,000 from its Re-envisioning Permanent Collections grant program to the Boston Athenæum. The award will support the reinstallation of artworks on the building’s first floor, which is open to the public.

The Athenæum will reinterpret and reimagine the display of the permanent collections, bringing forward a diverse selection of artworks including more work by and of women and people of color. The reinstalled first floor will tell a broader story about American history and the history of art, drawing on the wealth of the Athenæum’s lesser-known, historically significant, and recently acquired holdings. Work under this grant will emphasize three themes: portraiture and visibility; emancipation and abolition; and materiality and race.

“Our collections have been growing from the nineteenth century to the present. We are eager to apply fresh approaches to their presentation,” said John Buchtel, Curator of Rare Books and Head of Special Collections. “I’m grateful to the Terra Foundation for its support, which will help us showcase more and different works of art, inviting viewers to form new insights.”

For example, the project will reintroduce Bostonians and city visitors to *The Freedman*, an 1863 statue by John Quincy Adams Ward that was the most famous abolitionist sculpture of its day. The metal used in the Athenæum’s particularly significant cast includes a fragment of a cannon from Fort Wagner, South Carolina, where the Black troops of the Massachusetts 54th Regiment fought. Inspired by the Emancipation Proclamation, the work memorializes the war’s losses while expressing a hopeful future, as a formerly enslaved Black man takes hold of his own destiny.

The Freedman and other compelling art—including light-sensitive works on paper in regularly changing displays—will be placed on public view on the first floor alongside currently displayed works by Polly Thayer Starr, Allan Rohan Crite, John Singer Sargent, and others.

“We look forward to sharing a more expansive view of American art and history across a range of media,” said Leah Rosovsky, Stanford Calderwood Director of the Athenæum. “We want to invite and engage everyone to look at the works in our collections with fresh eyes, as we

ourselves are doing, and to ask questions that will lead to enlightening conversations and greater understanding.”

Assistant Curators Christina Michelon and Virginia Reynolds Badgett, specialists in American art history, will help direct the project, with components including community conversations and an academic colloquium. Ongoing curator-led public programming will continue to highlight and explore the special collections. The Terra-funded work is expected to extend into 2022.

ABOUT THE TERRA FOUNDATION FOR AMERICAN ART

The Terra Foundation for American Art supports individuals, organizations, and communities to advance expansive understandings of American art. Established in 1978 and headquartered in Chicago, with an office in Paris, its grant program, collection, and initiatives are committed to fostering cross-cultural dialogues on American art locally, nationally, and internationally.

ABOUT THE BOSTON ATHENÆUM

The Boston Athenæum’s landmark building and architecturally significant reading rooms at 10½ Beacon Street—and well-attended virtual programs every week—welcome all who are curious, including readers, thinkers, writers, and learners of all ages. From its founding, the Athenæum has collected artworks and books, including many by Boston- and New England-based creators, serving as a vital library and cultural center in Boston.

Learn more at bostonathenaeum.org.

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