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For Immediate Release

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Controversial Grant Wood *Sultry Night* print and painting united in exhibition at Des Moines Art Center

DES MOINES, IA (March 2018) On Friday March 30, the Des Moines Art Center will open *Sultry Night: Selected Works by Grant Wood*, which runs through June 24, 2018 in the John Brady Print Gallery.

In 1934, Grant Wood was asked to join the Associated American Artists (AAA) — a new business venture headquartered in New York, whose aim was to sell affordable prints to the masses in department stores and through mail-order catalogues. Wood admired the program’s democratic mission and accepted the invitation. In 1937, he produced his first lithograph, *Tree Planting Group*, which was priced at five dollars through the AAA. The artist eventually executed 19 lithographs for the program.

Sultry Night, one of the prints Wood created during this period, sparked controversy for its depiction of a farm hand bathing nude at a trough by moonlight. The work’s seductive, homoerotic nature led to questions regarding Wood’s sexuality. The United States Postal Service deemed the print pornographic and refused to deliver it. As a result, the lithograph’s edition was limited to 100 impressions — from a typical run of 250 — and it was only sold in New York. Despite this, Wood completed a painting of the same scene and title. However, after the painting was rejected from an international art exhibition, Wood, in exasperation, burned the section of the painting which featured the male nude and sold the remaining half to a family in Madison, Wisconsin where it has remained for more than half a century.

Sultry Night: Selected Works by Grant Wood features the suite of 19 lithographs Wood completed for the AAA, and in addition, the rarely seen *Sultry Night* painting, on loan from Wisconsin. This marks the first time



See captions below



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the painting has been publicly exhibited in Iowa. Also on view are early Impressionist paintings of the Iowa landscape Wood produced in the early 1920s.

In conjunction with the exhibition, art history professor Reed Anderson will lecture on the *Sultry Night* controversy, and discuss how Grant Wood's print relates to and departs from other artistic representations of male bathers. Additionally, he will explore the possibility that Wood deliberately invested this image and other depictions of male bathers with a gay subtext.

Sultry Night: Selected Works by Grant Wood is organized by Assistant Curator Jared Ledesma.

Captions

Left:

Grant Wood (American, 1891-1942)

Sultry Night, 1937

Lithograph on paper

Sheet: 11 5/8 x 15 inches

Image: 9 1/16 x 11 3/4 inches

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Fred S. Hird, Minneapolis to the Fred and Mary C. Hird Memorial, 1967.22

Photo: Rich Sanders, Des Moines

Right:

Grant Wood (American, 1891 - 1942)

Sultry Night, 1938

Oil on masonite

19 3/8 x 16 1/4 inches

In memory of Dr. and Mrs. Wellwood Nesbit by Martha Nesbit Frankwicz and Family

Photo courtesy of the Chazen Museum of Art

Related Programs

Gallery Dialogue with Assistant Curator Jared Ledesma

Thursday, April 26 / 6:30 pm

John Brady Print Gallery

Lecture: "Grant Wood's *Sultry Night* and the Politics of Depicting Males Bathing"

Thursday, May 17 / 6:30 pm

Reed Anderson, Associate Professor of Art History at the Kansas City Art Institute

Levitt Auditorium

Reservations required*

***FREE reservations/RSVPs can be made by visiting desmoinesartcenter.org and clicking on EVENT RESERVATIONS.**

Des Moines Art Center

Recognized by international art critics as a world-class museum in the heart of the Midwest, the Des Moines Art Center has amassed an important collection with a major emphasis on contemporary art. The collection's overriding principle is a representation of artists from the 19th century to the present, each through a seminal work. This accounts for an impressive collection that ranges from Edward Hopper's



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Automat to Jasper Johns' *Tennyson*, Henri Matisse's *Woman in White*, Georgia O'Keeffe's *From the Lake No. 1*, Francis Bacon's *Study after Velásquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, Bill Viola's *Ascension*, and Cecily Brown's *Half-Bind*.

The Art Center's physical complex marries with the collection for a totally integrated experience. The collection is housed in three major buildings, each designed by a world-renowned architect – Eliel Saarinen, I. M. Pei, and Richard Meier. With the exception of special events, admission to the museum is free.

In September 2009, the John and Mary Pappajohn Sculpture Park opened in Des Moines' Western Gateway Park. Philanthropists John and Mary Pappajohn have provided funding for and donated 29 sculptures by internationally acclaimed contemporary artists to the Des Moines Art Center. The collection of sculptures by such artists as Louise Bourgeois, Deborah Butterfield, Willem de Kooning, Mark di Suvero, Olafur Eliasson, Keith Haring, Ellsworth Kelly, Yayoi Kusama, Jaume Plensa, Richard Serra, and Joel Shapiro is the most significant donation of artwork to the Art Center in a single gift in the museum's history. The Pappajohn Sculpture Park is a collaboration of the Pappajohns, the City of Des Moines, the Des Moines Art Center, and numerous corporate and private donors.

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