

**“I really liked the way they presented their values and goals on the walls.”**

— Elliot Bostwick Davis, chair of MFA’s Art of the Americas Collection, referring to Mattatuck Museum in Waterbury



‘Icebergs,’ by Frederic Edwin Church (American, 1826-1900), 1863, Oil on canvas.

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

# ICEBERGS AHEAD

Loan from Boston marks just the tip of a new partnership between the Museum of Fine Arts and Mattatuck Museum

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REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

**P**restigious pieces of American art from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, will be making their way to Mattatuck Museum during the next six years.

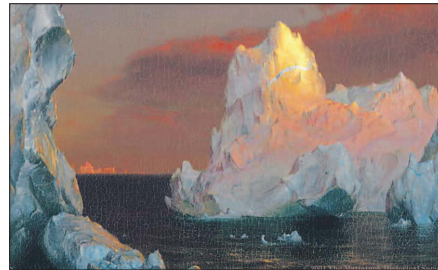
On Wednesday, the Mattatuck announced a new initiative with MFA to bring three exhibitions in the next six years to the Waterbury museum.

The first exhibit will include the MFA’s “Icebergs” (1863), by Frederic Edwin Church, a small painting that masterfully captures a grand subject: the vivid reflections of sunlight off the surface of an iceberg. It will be on display at the Mattatuck from June 24 through Sept. 2. Mattatuck will pair the loan with its own “Icebergs,” painted in 1871, and will augment the exhibit with historical material, including a book illustrated by Church, paintings of the Arctic by William Bradford and other contemporary works of the region.

This partnership is made possible by a grant of nearly \$2 million the MFA received from the Terra Foundation for American Art to expand access to American art. In addition to the Mattatuck, the MFA selected three other partners in the Northeast: the Fenimore Art Museum in Cooperstown, N.Y., the Michele and Donald D’Amour Museum of Fine Arts in Springfield, Mass., and the Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute in Utica, N.Y. Each will be loaned a single piece initially and then more pieces from the MFA as the project progresses.

“It is truly an honor to be recognized by our colleagues at the MFA,” said Bob Burns, Mattatuck director. “We look forward to both the collaboration with the MFA and the dialogue among the partnering institutions that this opportunity affords.”

The six-year initiative will aim to create collaborations among a wide range of institutions to generate exhibits at more than 80 museums and arts venues around



CONTRIBUTED

The Mattatuck Museum’s own ‘Icebergs’ painting is from 1871.

the country. Increasingly, art museums, such as Yale University Art Gallery, have tried to collaborate in making acquisitions and sharing their collections. Yale began such a collection-sharing program in 2010, partly because of the rising cost of art works, which are increasingly out of reach, cost-wise, of smaller, regional museums.

“It’s about sharing our collection, which is an old collection, a large collection but it’s really more about our learning about these audiences, which are not like our audiences in an urban setting,” said Elliot Bostwick Davis, chair of MFA’s Art of the Americas Collection. “I don’t think it’s all about our telling these smaller museums what to do but our being open-minded about what we can learn from them. We’re going to learn a lot about how these works of art from our collection resound in other communities. Every time these works of art are put in different settings, we learn an awful lot.”

The MFA’s Art of the Americas Collection contains about 15,000 works. The Mattatuck contains more than 2,300 works of art as well as more than 100,000 objects and artifacts.

**THE SECOND PHASE** of the project will entail the creation of several small-scale exhibitions.

featuring objects drawn from MFA’s collection that will be developed with and displayed at each of the partner institutions. The third and final phase of the project will culminate in two larger-scale exhibitions drawn from the collections of all participating museums.

Throughout this process, curators will pay special attention to how exhibition content, organization and installation should change between venues to ensure relevance for different audiences.



Davis

Curator Cynthia Roznoy said the MFA’s Davis visited several regional museums, without alerting staff, to select four that would become partners. Davis said she was particularly impressed by the Mattatuck Museum’s mission statement, which reads, in part: “The Mattatuck Museum is a center of art and history, a gathering place that nurtures creativity and learning through transformative experiences to encourage a deeper understanding of ourselves and our heritage.”

“I really liked the way they presented their values and goals on the walls,” she said. “It seemed very dynamic. It seemed like a place with a different variety of shows. The Mattatuck have great ephemera, great mid-century design. The buttons were just

mind-blowing. I wasn’t prepared for that.”

“That was such an affirmation that somebody from the MFA would identify that our museum was strong enough for us to be a partner,” Roznoy said.

Mattatuck staff subsequently traveled to Boston to discuss the program before selecting a work they believed would pair well with the Waterbury institution.

The MFA is the first museum to receive a Terra-Art Bridges grant to examine and test new approaches to sharing collections, increasing scholarship and expanding access to and experiences of American art.

“It is important that the MFA shares its resources generously as we work to make our communities stronger,” said Matthew Teitelbaum, MFA director. “We are immensely proud to participate in Terra-Art Bridges and grateful for this opportunity to introduce audiences in New England and New York State to artworks from our collection.”

**IN 1859, CHURCH** and the Rev. Louis Legrand Noble, the biographer of Thomas Cole, traveled to the North Atlantic between Labrador and Greenland to sketch icebergs. Like many mid-19th century artists, Church had been deeply affected by the works of the naturalist and explorer, Alexander von Humboldt, whose treatises encouraged artists to travel and paint equatorial South America.

Church’s small, painted sketch captures the grandeur of a large subject and showcases the Hudson River School painter’s skill with depicting light in his works.

“It’s a small show, it’s tightly focused,” said Roznoy. “We’re delighted because it’s a mix of art and science.”

More contemporary works, like a painting from Gregory Amenoff and large-scale photographs from contemporary artist Lynn Davis, will be in the June exhibit. “It brings the subject into the modern day and allows us to talk about the science and the environment and even a little bit of politics.”