

P R E S S   R E L E A S E

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: September 28, 2009

Williams College Museum of Art Presents  
***A Strong Impression: William Morris Hunt's Niagara***  
October 17, 2009–January 31, 2010

Williamstown, MA – The Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) presents ***A Strong Impression: William Morris Hunt's Niagara***, which examines both the artistic and cultural context in which Hunt's painting, *Niagara Falls* (1878), was produced through oil sketches, drawings, photographs, films, rare books, and souvenirs. This exhibition, and three others, including, ***Alec Soth: NIAGARA***, ***William Morris Hunt and the French Tradition***, and ***Media Field: Niagara***, contrast historical and contemporary views of Niagara Falls and put the Falls into a broader context. On Thursday, October 29 at 5:00 pm, a Season Premiere Party will celebrate the opening of these exhibitions and will feature a conversation between exhibition curator Kathryn Price and Williams College professors Marc Gotlieb and Michael Lewis about Niagara Falls. This is a free event and all are invited to attend.

***A Strong Impression: William Morris Hunt's Niagara*** features Hunt's monumental painting, *Niagara Falls* (1878), which was one of the largest easel paintings that Hunt ever produced. The painting has been in WCMA's collection since 1961. Although Hunt was best known for his portrait painting in Boston, he saw this commission to paint the Falls for the New York State Capitol Assembly Chamber as a way to establish himself in the practice of landscape, and particularly, in the tradition of Frederic Edwin Church. Church was a well-known American landscape painter and Hunt was so taken with Church's famous 1857

depiction of Niagara Falls, that he chose the same vantage point for his own painting.

*A Strong Impression* reunites nine of Hunt's studies in oil, pastel, and charcoal that show Niagara Falls from various perspectives while closely examining the Falls within Hunt's body of work. Using Frederic Edwin Church's oil sketch of the Falls from the Olana State Historic Site, additional artwork, rare books, maps, photographs, and souvenirs, this exhibition traces the evolution of Niagara Falls as an inspirational icon to an emblem of environmental activism. The museum recently acquired a pastel by Hunt depicting the rapids near the Falls, which will go on view for the first time in this exhibition.

"It is exciting to put WCMA's painting of Hunt's *Niagara Falls* into a more detailed context. This exhibition has even more significance because it is the first time Hunt's monumental painting has been shown with other studies Hunt did for Niagara Falls outside the artist's studio," explains exhibition curator Kathryn Price.

Additionally, this is the first time in fifty years that Hunt's *Niagara Falls* will be reunited with its outer frame. Originally, this painting traveled with two frames– a large outer frame and a liner frame– as was customary in the nineteenth-century. Both frames have recently been treated at the Williamstown Art Conservation Center and are now displayed at WCMA together, allowing the painting to be viewed in its entirety.

### **Also on View**

Placing *A Strong Impression: William Morris Hunt's Niagara* into a broader context are three concurrent exhibitions. **Alec Soth: NIAGARA** (October 10, 2009–January 10, 2010) presents 22 photographs by contemporary photographer Alec Soth, who from 2004 to 2005, photographed sobering contemporary views of life on both the American and Canadian sides of Niagara Falls. **William Morris Hunt and the French Tradition** (October 24, 2009–January 31, 2010) connects Hunt's painting to the traditions of the Barbizon School and explores Hunt's role in bringing French artistic ideas to the United States. The Barbizon School refers to a group of 19th-century painters who painted primarily natural subjects and landscapes, and moved toward the practice of realism in their art. Works on view include artists such as Jean-François Millet, Théodore Rousseau, and Charles François Daubigny. **Media Field: Niagara** (October 17, 2009–January 31, 2010) brings together films by

Thomas Edison and the Lumière Brothers, as well as clips featuring Marilyn Monroe and The Three Stooges, to provide examples of Niagara Falls as a pop and cultural icon.

Each of these exhibitions explores the notion of Niagara Falls—and the idea of landscape—in different ways, connecting them to WCMA's thematic year of landscape as topography, sustainer of life, site of conservation activism, cultural icon, metaphor, and object of awe and spiritual reverence.

### **Related Programs**

#### **Season Premiere Party: Views of Niagara**

Thursday, October 29

5:00–7:00 pm

In conjunction with *A Strong Impression: William Morris Hunt's Niagara* and *Alec Soth: NIAGARA*, join us for a dialogue with Marc Gotlieb, Director of the Graduate Program in the History of Art and Class of 1955 Memorial Professor of Art; Michael Lewis, Faison-Pierson-Stoddard Professor of Art History; and Kathryn Price, Interim Associate Curator.

#### **Inventing Niagara**

Thursday, November 5

7:00 pm

A conversation with photographer Alec Soth, whose work is currently on view, and writer Ginger Strand, author of *Inventing Niagara: Beauty, Power, and Lies*.

#### **The Williams College Museum of Art**

The Williams College Museum of Art is open Tuesday through Saturday, from 10 am to 5 pm, and on Sunday from 1 to 5 pm. Admission is free and the museum is wheelchair accessible. For more information, please contact: Suzanne Silitch, Director of Communications and Strategy, 413.597.3178.