

**Spencer Museum of Art to Unveil Major Redesign of Its Fourth Floor,  
Encompassing 15,000 Square-Foot of Gallery and Teaching Spaces**

**Project Includes Complete Reimagining of Collection Installations, Featuring New Acquisitions,  
And the Creation of New Study Center**

**Lawrence, KS (January 26, 2023)**—This February, the Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas will formally unveil a major redesign of its fourth floor, encompassing nearly 15,000 square-feet of presentation and teaching space. The approximately \$4 million project includes a reinstallation of the museum’s collection around themes that engage with our social and political experiences as well as the creation of the new, multi-purpose Ingrid & J.K. Lee Study Center. The completion of this renovation—which embraces more than half of the Spencer’s galleries—marks the conclusion of the second phase of design work at the museum led by acclaimed architecture firm Pei Cobb Freed & Partners. The overarching design emphasizes the development of galleries that allow for dynamic object presentations, new and expanded gathering and study spaces, and on-site collection storage, as well as improvements to wayfinding, sightlines, and the flow of light in the building. The project is fully funded through government and private foundation grants, including two grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, totaling \$800,000, as well as individual private philanthropy. This work is part of the Spencer’s broader strategic efforts to expand connections with its community and to explore the changing roles of museums.

“The Spencer is committed to providing a welcoming environment for students, faculty, scholars, and visitors of diverse backgrounds and experiences. The reimagining of our fourth floor has created new and captivating spaces for gathering, learning, and connecting with art and with each other,” said Saralyn Reece Hardy, the Marilyn Stokstad Director at the Spencer Museum of Art. “At the same time, this work has led us to newly conceptualize how we interpret and share our collections, with considerations toward the changing interests and needs of our audiences and the ways in which the museum field is evolving. We are eager to engage people with our vision for the museum and collection, which is grounded in weaving more nuanced and expansive narratives of art, cultures, and peoples, and in reflecting a much broader range of voices.”

At the core of the project is the reinstallation of works from the Spencer’s 48,000-object collection, which spans time periods, geography, cultures, and mediums. Works on the fourth floor will now be presented in four distinct but interrelated thematic groupings that acknowledge the histories of objects, their meanings to different audiences and populations, and how they came to exist within the collection. The reinstallation includes recent acquisitions—including the important painting *Arena* (1959) by **Elaine de Kooning** and a contemporary ceramic pot from Nigeria by an **Igala artist**—and highlights long-standing audience favorites such as *Le Discret* (c. 1791) by **Joseph Ducreux** and **Thomas Hart Benton**’s *The*

*Ballad of the Jealous Lover of Lone Green Valley* (1934). More information about the installation themes follows.

- **Empowerment:** This gallery explores notions of power, questioning how power is created and takes form as well as what it means to be empowered in the creation and experience of art. Among the highlights are: *Portrait of Chantelle Keshaye Pahtayken & Shay Pahtayken, Plains Cree* (2019) by artist **Ryan RedCorn** (Osage), which subverts the history of white photographers capturing the likenesses of Native peoples and returns control to the sitters in their portrayal; *Cause de la pollution (The Cause of Pollution)* (2013) by the contemporary Congolese artist **Somi**, which will be on view for the first time and explores through painting the ecological concerns and responsibilities of humans to care for the earth; and a multimedia work with beads and glass, titled *Caffeine* (1994–1999), by Baltimore-based artist **Joyce J. Scott** that explores the power of caffeine in our lives as part of her broader examinations of difficult issues such as addiction, violence, and racism.
- **Displacement:** Here, the Spencer examines how objects move through the world—across geography, time, and culture—and in doing so take on historical records of personal and communal experiences. Among the highlights are: *Displaced Peoples 2* (2011) by **Chris Pappan** (Osage, Kaw, Cheyenne River Lakota Sioux), which is part of a series of works that explores the harmful effects of the forced displacement of peoples through figurative painting and maps of present-day Kansas and Oklahoma; the first presentation of an earthenware floor installation, titled *Aylan and Others* (2015), by Turkish artist **Zehra Çobanlı** that responds to the drowning of Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old Syrian refugee, in 2015; and *Donning Animal Skins and Braided Grass* (2011), a sculpture by artist **Konoike Tomoko** that references the extermination of two native Japanese wolf species in the 19th century as a result of human modernization.
- **Illumination:** In this gallery, visitors will encounter works that engage with the physical properties, ideas, and emotions associated with lightness and darkness. Among the highlights are: *Night & Day, Day & Night* (2015), a luminous large-scale clock that measures the day with 24 words describing time and duration written in Devanāgarī script by the **Raqs Media Collective** formed in New Delhi, India in 1992; *Soleil Couchant, Marine* (1865 or 1869), a painting by **Gustave Courbet** that captures the light at dusk, offering an expressive vision of the sea in all its supreme vastness; and *Poyet Projection* (2000), a painting by contemporary Chicago-based artist **Ellen Lanyon** that pays homage to 19th-century French engraver Louis Poyet (1846–1913) by exploring the boundaries between light and dark, the artificial and natural, and fantasy and realism.
- **Intersections:** The works and content in this thematic grouping highlight the convergence of social rituals, creativity, and innovation and the ways in which they are complicated by long legacies of colonialism and consumption. Wall labels and didactics grapple with the role of the museum in perpetuating colonialist histories and approaches and explore how museums can connect with their audiences by offering greater transparency and improving understanding of the narratives and experiences of world cultures. The gallery includes artwork cases that provide broad overviews of how objects are used in cultural ceremony and ritual; how certain materials have spurred global consumption, leading to the degradation of people and environments; and examples of innovators and disruptors in the field, whether artists or art world leaders.

“Exploring ‘the intersection of art, ideas, and experience’ is a key aspect of the Spencer’s mission and provides the underlying framework for the four collection galleries. In developing the themes and identifying objects from the collection, we emphasized multidisciplinary approaches and wide-ranging perspectives to inspire and connect with the different experiences and interests that people may bring to the galleries,” said Celka Straughn, the Spencer’s Deputy Director for Public Practice and Curatorial and the Mellon Director of Academic Programs.

As part of the reimagining of the fourth floor—and with the support of a \$900,000 grant from the J.K. and Ingrid Lee Foundation—the Spencer has also created the new 1,150-square-foot Ingrid & J.K. Lee Study Center. The new center joins two other study centers at the museum located on the third floor that were established as part of the first phase of museum renovations. The multi-purpose space will feature rotating, temporary installations of largely three-dimensional works from the Spencer’s collection, especially from its extensive Asian art holdings. Large, moveable drawers and cases provide new close-up access to objects, enabling greater study and engagement among students, faculty, visiting scholars, and members of the public during gallery hours and guided programming. The Spencer is part of KU’s nationally recognized research ecosystem, and the new study space increases opportunities for cross-disciplinary learning at the museum.

Additionally, the fourth floor includes two interior balconies that will serve as spaces for special exhibitions. Here, on February 18, the Spencer will open *Dissent, Discontent, and Action: Pictures of US*, featuring two bodies of work by photographer Accra Shepp. Taken approximately a decade apart, the *Occupying Wall Street* and *The Covid Journals* series capture portraits of community, hope, and resilience during two periods of significant social, political, and environmental change. On view through June 25, 2023, the exhibition also creates compelling juxtapositions and dialogues with the themes and works explored in the collection galleries.

### **About the Spencer Museum of Art**

[The Spencer Museum of Art](#), located on the University of Kansas Lawrence campus, explores the intersection of art, ideas, and experiences. With a diverse collection of more than 48,000 works, the Spencer is the only museum in Kansas with contemporary and historic artwork in all mediums from cultures across six continents. The Spencer Museum facilitates arts engagement and research through exhibitions, artist commissions and residencies, conferences, performances, lectures, children’s art activities, and arts and culture festivals. Admission to the Spencer Museum of Art is free.

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