

Spencer Museum announces KU Common Work of Art for 2025-2026



Hollis Sigler, "Haunted by the Ghosts of Our Own Making," 1995, oil, canvas, Museum purchase, 1996.0008

LAWRENCE — The Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas has announced “Haunted by the Ghosts of Our Own Making” by Hollis Sigler as the [KU Common Work of Art](#) for the 2025-2026 academic year. The painting complements the [KU Reads book](#), “The Anthropocene Reviewed: Essays on a Human-Centered Planet” by John Green.

Both Green's text and Sigler's painting incorporate autobiographical references while pondering the larger question of what it means to be human in the modern era. Together the KU Reads selection and KU Common Work of Art serve as entry points to inspire curiosity and generate enthusiasm for scholarly inquiry across disciplines, providing opportunities for the KU community to come together for engaged discussion and discovery in the classroom and beyond.

Celka Straughn, Spencer Museum director of academic programs, said shared themes from both selections include memory, hope, illness, survival, wonder and distinguishing facts from misinformation.

"Sigler's painting and Green's essays cast light on a subject to make it visible from multiple perspectives," Straughn said. "Their work encourages us to look behind the curtain of what might seem invisible, such as the consequences of human actions in the age of the Anthropocene."

Sigler was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1985. From the 1990s until her death in 2001, her art focused on her personal struggle with cancer as well as the disease's effects on society. "Haunted by the Ghosts of Our Own Making" focuses on dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane, the insecticide more commonly known as DDT. The painting presents a theatrical stage with curtains parted to reveal a sunset backdrop and a performance of ghostly skeletal servers attending a diner-less table prepared for a feast. Scratched faintly above are the letters "DDT" and a crop-duster spraying the scene. Sigler inscribes her message around the handmade frame: "Although the use of DDT has been banned by the Government for years, its long-term effects are now being recognized. The cancer-causing potential of pesticides in use today may be hidden for years to come."

"Haunted by the Ghosts of our Own Making" is on view in the Spencer Museum's Michaelis Gallery as part of the "Empowerment" exhibition. The Spencer Museum is free to visit and open to the public six days a week.

Resources for expanding conversation about the KU Common Work of Art [are available online](#).