

KU's new Common Work of Art to examine humans' role in changing climate, environment

: 5/7/2025



photo by: University of Kansas

“Haunted by the Ghosts of Our Own Making” by the late American artist Hollis Sigler, pictured above, has been chosen as KU's Common Work of Art for the 2025-2026 school year.

An artwork that warns of the dangers of the pesticide DDT has been chosen as the “Common Work of Art” that will be featured on the University of Kansas campus during the next school year.

The painting “Haunted by the Ghosts of Our Own Making” by the late American artist Hollis Sigler has been chosen as the Common Work of Art. The piece is being paired with a book — “The Anthropocene Reviewed: Essays on a Human-Centered Planet” by John Green — that examines how humans are impacting the planet’s biodiversity and other natural systems.

“Sigler’s painting and Green’s essays cast light on a subject to make it visible from multiple perspectives,” Celka Straughn, the Spencer Museum of Art’s director of academic programs, said of the selections.”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 — who gained attention as a member of Chicago’s art scene — was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1985, and died in 2001. Her works often focused on her personal struggles with cancer, and the work “Haunted by the Ghosts of Our Own Making” directly takes on a pesticide that has been linked to cancer and ultimately banned in the U.S. in 1972.

The painting shows a theatrical stage and a dinner table with faint outlines of skeleton-like ghosts around its edges, along with a border that contains commentary about the dangers of DDT.

The artwork currently is on display at the Spencer Museum of Art on the Lawrence campus. Both the artwork and the book will be used throughout the coming school year in a variety of classrooms and discussions in an effort to “inspire curiosity and generate enthusiasm for scholarly inquiry,” according to a KU press release.

The book, “The Anthropocene Reviewed,” refers to the current geological period of Earth, which is defined as a time period where humans are the dominant influence on the planet’s climate and environment. Green, the book’s author, is a novelist and YouTube personality who made his nonfiction debut with “The Anthropocene Reviewed,” which was adapted from a podcast of the same topic.