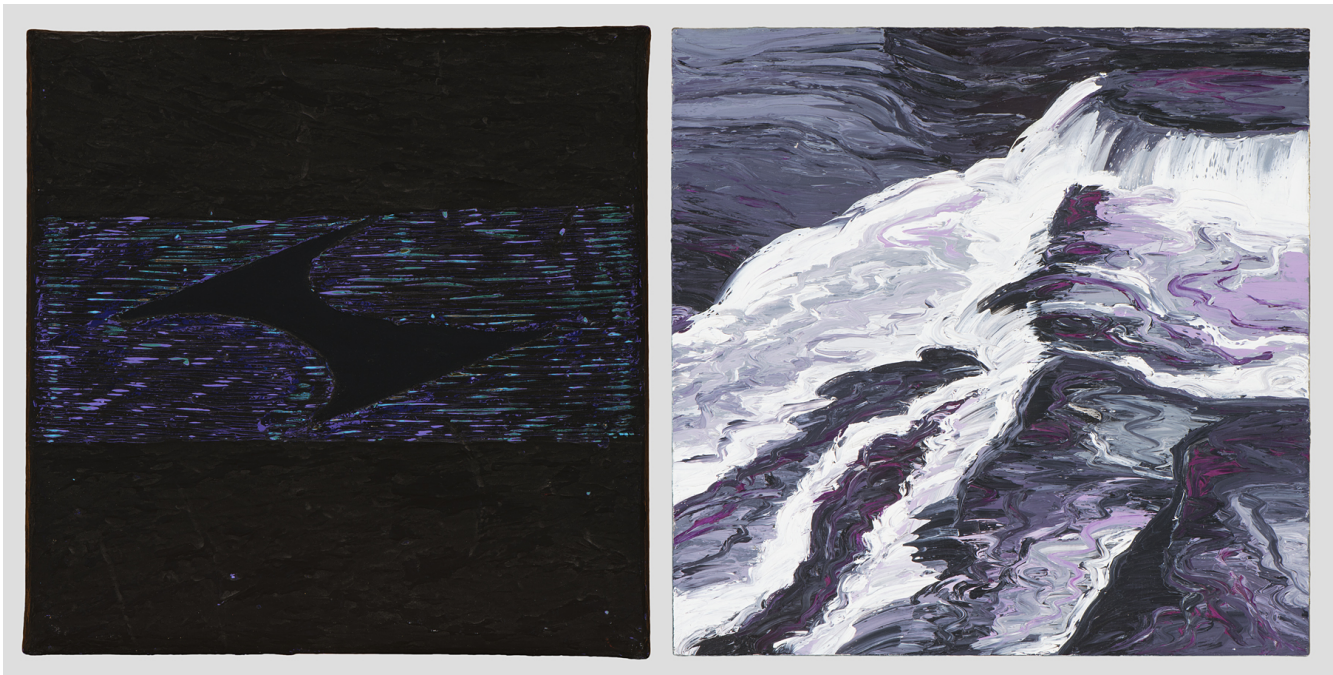


Spencer Museum announces KU Common Work of Art for 2026-2027

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Kay WalkingStick, “Winter Flight,” 1988-1989, oil, acrylic, wax, canvas, Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas. Museum purchase: Peter T. Bohan Art Acquisition Fund, 2003.0078.a,b

LAWRENCE — The Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas has announced “Winter Flight” by Kay WalkingStick as the [KU Common Work of Art](#) for the 2026-2027 academic year. The painting complements themes from the [KU Reads book](#), “Orbital” by Samantha Harvey.

Both Harvey and WalkingStick use unconventional structures with familiar forms, the novel and landscape painting, to contemplate humanity, its relationship with Earth and humans’ relationships with one another. 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.

According to WalkingStick, she created “Winter Flight,” one of her signature two-panel landscape paintings, in the period following her first husband’s sudden death. The more representational panel on the right evokes the surging waters of a deep gorge near the Cornell campus in Ithaca, New York, where she taught. The more abstract panel on the left reveals densely textured bands of dark black and blue paint.

“The two canvases create more together than on their own. Like Earth and the solar system, they are mutually dependent,” said Celka Straughn, the Spencer Museum’s director of academic programs.

The prize-winning novel “Orbital” offers an exploration of what it means to be human and our lives and relationships to, with and on planet Earth. Short chapters organized by ascending and descending orbits across the span of a 24-hour day on Earth provide mediative views of life aboard a space station for six astronauts from five nations.

“The churning of grief felt in WalkingStick’s thick application of paint and representation of the powerful force of a waterfall evoke the awe, uncertainty and fragility of life, themes ever-present in life aboard the space station,” Straughn said.

“Winter Flight” 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](#).