

# Spencer Museum of Art at University of Kansas acquires 17 works by contemporary Indigenous artists

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November 13, 2024



The Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas announced on November 13, 2024, the acquisition of 17 works across mediums by 12 contemporary Indigenous artists. The group includes mixed media works by Jeffrey Gibson (Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and Cherokee) and Henry Payer (Ho-Chunk); photography by ShelleyNiro (Mohawk), Lisa Reihana (Māori), and Cara Romero (Chemehuevi); works on paper by Chris Pappan (Osage, Kaw, Cheyenne River Lakota Sioux), and Dyani White Hawk (Sičáŋǵu Lakota); and design objects by Jamie Okuma (Luiseno, Shoshone-Bannock, Wailaki, and Okinawan), Aiyana Jack (Yankton Sioux Tribe), Elias Jade Not Afraid (Apsaalooké/Crow Tribe), Jodi Webster (Ho-Chunk, Prairie Band Potawatomi), and Naomi Glasses (Diné) in collaboration with Polo Ralph Lauren.

Many of the objects represent first entries by the artists to the Spencer's holdings. The acquisitions are part of the Spencer's ongoing work to make Indigenous voices and practices more prominent within its collection and exhibitions. This commitment is especially important in the museum's hometown of Lawrence—and the surrounding region—where there are a number of thriving Indigenous communities.

Some of the works announced today were acquired as part of the Spencer's current exhibition *Native Fashion*. The show explores the diversity and ingenuity of wearable artworks produced by Native people from the 19th century into today and is [on view at the museum through January 5, 2025](#). Other artworks are slated for inclusion in upcoming exhibitions. Photographs by Niro, Reihana, and Romero, for example, will be featured in *Bold Women*, which opens on February 18 and focuses on the artistic innovations of women of diverse identities, while the works by Chris Pappan will be included in a presentation later in 2025.

“The Spencer Museum is committed to sharing the creative voices of Native artists and to ensuring that our visitors have opportunities to engage with Native experience and artistry. This is essential to enhancing representation within our galleries and our collection,” Saralyn Reece Hardy, the Spencer's Marilyn Stokstad Director, said. “Aligning our acquisitions with our exhibition program ensures that the ongoing diversification of our collection is immediately felt by audiences through in-gallery presentations. This approach supports community connection and helps us understand public interest as we continue to expand both the collection and consider the ways we present it.”

## Acquisition Highlights:

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Chris Pappan, 'Scars of History 2,' 2024. Image courtesy of Blue Rain Gallery Museum purchase: Peter T. Bohan Art Acquisition Fund, 2024.0138

- **Jamie Okuma. *Becoming*, 2022.** Okuma specializes in creating one-of-a-kind wearable pieces that feature intricate single-stitch beadwork. *Becoming* is from a series of works inspired by the artist's interest in horror films and is among the first works by Okuma that does not include overt Indigenous imagery or patterning. The convertible piece, which can be worn as either a purse or backpack, highlights Indigenous artists as contemporary makers with wide-ranging interests and inspirations. *Becoming* is the first object by the artist to enter the Spencer's collection and is currently on view as part of Native Fashion.
- **Chris Pappan. *The Sacred in Motion*, 2024, and *Scars of History 2*, 2024.** Pappan's art challenges distorted perceptions of Native peoples, while also boldly asserting their presence in contemporary culture. The two acquired works are ledger art collages that engage with the story of In'zhúje'waxóbe, the Sacred Red Rock, which was rematriated to Kaw Nation in 2023 following activist and community efforts. The 28-ton boulder, a sacred object known as "Grandfather" by the Kaw people, was taken from its original location to a park in Lawrence and turned into a commemoration of European settlement. Its return to the Kaw people marks a major community milestone and will be the subject of an exhibition at the Spencer in 2025 that will feature Pappan's works.
- **Jodi Webster. *Skoden*, 2023.** This silver gorget—a metal piece historically worn to protect vital organs in conflict—is hand-engraved with the profiles of the four main characters in the television series *Reservation Dogs*, co-created by Sterlin Harjo (Seminole/Muskogee) and Taika Waititi (Te-Whanau-a-Apanui). In the 1700s, gorgets were used to solidify diplomatic relations with Indigenous leaders. Today, gorgets are worn as a symbol of Indigenous survival in the face of colonization. Webster's work melds this history with the important representation achieved through Harjo and Waititi's series. *Skoden* is the first object by the artist to enter the Spencer's collection and is currently on view as part of Native Fashion.
- **Jeffrey Gibson. *himmak pilla*, 2022.** Gibson's two-dimensional works engage with the visual vocabulary of Modernism, while also finding inspiration and reference in Indigenous patterns. He often brings these two histories together to create vibrant graphic works that speak to a new contemporary evolution. *himmak pilla*, which means "in the future" in the Choctaw language, features an inlaid central panel made through intricate beadwork. The beaded pattern extends into a vivid screen print that amplifies the color and line outward. The work reflects Gibson's interest in interrogating different cultures, times, and histories. It is the first object by the artist to enter the collection and is currently on view as part of Native Fashion.

- **Naiomi Glasses in collaboration with Polo Ralph Lauren. Wool Coat, 2024.** Glasses, a seventh-generation textile artist, served as the inaugural Artist-in-Residence for Ralph Lauren. Through the program, Glasses developed a clothing collection inspired by Indigenous aesthetics and weaving techniques that she learned from her grandmother. The Wool Coat represents a key example of Glasses' design practice and reflects a productive and positive partnership between a major brand and Indigenous creators. The Wool Coat is the first object by the artist to enter the Spencer's collection and is currently on view as part of Native Fashion.
- **Dyani White Hawk. *They Gifted (Night)*, 2025, and *To See With Intention*, 2025.** Of Sičáŋǵu Lakota and European American ancestry, White Hawk often brings together Indigenous traditions of abstraction with those of Minimalism and Color Field painting. These two prints capture her singular aesthetic as she works to upend long-standing art historical narratives and reveal under-studied connections and inspirations. The works feature arrangements of color bands and intricate forms produced through thousands of meticulously painted strokes. The labor-intensive processes involved in making the work recollect and celebrate the invisible labor of the many Lakota women who made quill- and, later, bead-based art. These are the first works by White Hawk to enter the collection.

## About the Spencer Museum of Art

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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.