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Art Exhibition Taps into Regional Conferences on Water, Establishing Dialogue Between Kaw and Yangtze Rivers

Lawrence, KS, March 7, 2013 – Water is timeless... or is it? [Conversation XIV: Water](#), an installation of modern and contemporary works from the Spencer's permanent collection, explores artists' perspectives on the elixir of life: H₂O. Many of the works assembled for this installation take an eco-critical approach to the subject matter, exploring pollution and scarcity, whereas others address water less literally and more symbolically, as a cleansing or destructive force. From this selection of 20th- and 21st-century works, a subtle visual dialogue emerges between the Kaw River of Kansas and the Yangtze of China. Most of the works on display are recent acquisitions.

Several local research opportunities related to water this spring prompted this installation, most notably two conferences: *Global Water: Drought, Conservation and Security in the 21st Century* and *Changing Nature: Migrations, Energies, Limits*. During the course of the exhibition, the Spencer will promote recommendations of literary and cinematic works exploring both the symbolic and physical power of water.

This exhibition occurs at a time when water is at the forefront of not only academic discourse, but also public discourse. Following two consecutive years of drought punctuated by flooding, and opening to the public the day after World Water Day (observed every March 22 since 1993), *Conversation XIV: Water* could not be a more timely exploration. Because artists' approaches tend to follow routes left unexplored by

other researchers, a much-discussed and hotly debated subject will take on new dimensions in the museum setting.

Artists represented in the exhibition range from Havana-born conceptual artist Ernesto Pujol to Kansas painter and printmaker Lisa Grossman, whose work focuses on the open spaces and prairies of eastern Kansas and the Kansas River Valley.

One of the works on view, *Changjiangg Xingzou—Jingtí* (which translates as *Yangtze River Walk—Crystals*) is a performance piece by artist Chen Zhiyuan, who drank from the Yangtze River for 21 days while following the length of the river from Shanghai to the remote province of Qinghai. Unlike artistic predecessors who have written poems or created reverent paintings to praise the beauty of landscape along the River, Chen experienced the scenery through his body.

Another work of art created at great risk to the artist's safety is a photograph by DoDo Jin Ming portraying the immense power of turbulent waters. To capture her incomparably dramatic views of the stormy sea, Ming ventured out in whipping winds and positioned herself where sailors would fear to tread: ocean jetties, rocks, precipices.

Conversation XIV: Water opens March 23 and runs through July 28.

Local Research Opportunities:

Global Water: Drought, Conservation & Security in the 21st Century

April 12-13 | The Commons at the University of Kansas, sponsored by the Environmental Studies Program as well as the combined area and international studies centers at the University of Kansas.

From sub-Saharan Africa to India to American Midwest, rural and urban communities are attempting to deal with drought conditions. This conference will address various approaches to resolving the technical, social, political and environmental issues associated with the use and sustainability of this precious resource.

Changing Nature: Migrations, Energies, Limits

The 10th Biennial Conference held by the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment

May 28-June 1 | The University of Kansas, Kansas Union, Ballroom

Plenary lectures will be delivered by **Wes Jackson** (President of the Land Institute and author of several books, including *Becoming Native to This Place and Nature as Measure*), oil and energy expert **Antonia Juhasz** (recipient of a 2012-2013 Investigative Journalism Fellowship from the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California, Berkeley to cover oil and gas issues in Afghanistan and lead author and editor of the 2010 edition of *The True Cost of Chevron: An Alternative Annual Report*), **Daniel Wildcat** (professor at Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, co-director of the Haskell Environmental Research Studies Center, and author of *Red Alert! Saving the Planet with Indigenous Knowledge*), *Donald Worster* (a foundational scholar in the field of environmental history, author of *A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir*, *Dust Bowl: the Southern Plains in the 1930s*, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*, and *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West*) and others. **Plenary lectures for this conference will be open to the public, but space is limited. For a complete list of speakers and other information, please visit the conference website, asle.ku.edu.**

Local resources for pertinent information on water issues:

- [Friends of the Kaw](#)
- [Baker Wetlands](#)
- [Water.org](#)
- [University of Kansas Feedstock to Tailpipe Initiative](#), supported by KU's Transportation Research Institute:
- [Kansas Department of Agriculture, Division of Water Resources](#)
- [Kansas Geological Survey](#)
- [Article from The Wichita Eagle about the Wichita City Council's decision to raise the cost of water due to recent depletion](#)

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