

# Spencer Museum's fall exhibitions showcase art of the sea, regional artists and the Sacred Red Rock

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Winslow Homer, "Cloud Shadows," 1890, William Bridges Thayer Memorial, 1928.1781, Image courtesy of the Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas.

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LAWRENCE — This fall the Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas will present three special exhibitions, beginning with “Soundings: Making Culture at Sea,” which opens Aug. 12.

“[Soundings](#)” explores how visual representations of oceans from different times and places across history have helped humans articulate questions and concerns that are political, cultural and environmental. Themes for the show include maps as tools for both navigation and visualizing different cultural experiences; the sea as a source of both sustenance and suffering; the fragility of ocean ecosystems; the unique relationships that Indigenous cultures share with the ocean; and facilitating global trade. The exhibition is curated by Emily Casey, Hall Assistant Professor of American Art and Culture, in collaboration with Celka Straughn, Spencer Museum's director of academic programs.

“While we tend to locate human culture on the land we inhabit, the seas we imagine and cross are also a place where culture is created,” Casey said. “This exhibition is a great example of collaborations between the museum and the classroom, and it was inspired by a course I teach at KU and the richness of the Spencer Museum’s collection.”

“Soundings” remains on view through Dec. 14.



Artist Merry Sun works in her studio.

Opening Aug. 26 is [“My Mother’s Tongue Ties Me Together,”](#) the 2025 Charlotte Street Visual Artist Awards exhibition. Since 1997, these awards have celebrated the achievements of contemporary artists living in the Kansas City area. The Spencer Museum is honored to host this exhibition for the first time with featured artists Noelle Choy, Hùng Lê and Merry Sun. All three artists explore themes of cultural mythmaking, memory and migration through a range of media.

“This is the first time that three people of Asian descent have ever won the Charlotte Street Visual Artist Awards concurrently, so I am really proud to be a part of that,” Sun said. “We’re telling really unique stories about our personal histories and the trials and tribulations that we’ve had to undergo.”

“My Mother’s Tongue Ties Me Together” remains on view through Jan. 4, 2026.



James Pepper Henry, "In'zhúje'waxóbe & Stars," (detail), 2024, Courtesy of the artist

Finally, opening Sept. 9 is [“In'zhúje'waxóbe: Return of the Sacred Red Rock.”](#) This exhibition tells the story of the repatriation of In'zhúje'waxóbe, or the Sacred Red Rock, from the city of Lawrence to Kaw Nation through artwork created by local artists and Kaw tribal citizens. The Sacred Red Rock is a 28-ton red Siouxan quartzite boulder that holds immense cultural and spiritual significance for the Kanza people of the Kaw Nation. “Return of the Sacred Red Rock” is organized by Sydney Pursel, curator for public practice, alongside an advisory committee of Kaw Nation citizens.

“This exhibition highlights the power of community collaboration, advocacy and activism in the spirit of reconciliation,” Pursel said. “I am excited to work alongside Kaw citizens to ensure that their history, stories and culture are represented appropriately and accurately.”

“Return of the Sacred Red Rock” remains on view through Jan. 25, 2026.

Admission to the Spencer Museum and to all these exhibitions is free for everyone. These exhibitions and related programs are supported by the Mellon Foundation, the Jeff and Mary Weinberg Director’s Fund, the Linda Inman Bailey Exhibitions Fund, the Dolo Brooking Freedom Fund, Friends of the Art Museum, Charlotte Street, the Kress Foundation Department of Art History and KU Student Senate.