

'Past Presence' exhibition invites visitors to contemplate and share how history shapes the future

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LAWRENCE — The Spencer Museum of Art’s new exhibition “Past Presence” features work by artists who have used historic moments and personal memories as the focus of their art. Together these works visualize how personal and collective memory influence our understandings of the past, present and future.

“Past Presence” was curated by Sara Stepp, a doctoral candidate in the history of art and intern at the Spencer Museum in European and American art. Stepp said the exhibition prompts visitors to think about how, why and what they choose to remember about the past.

“I hope visitors will find personal connections with works in the exhibition and reflect on the ways their own histories have shaped who they are,” Stepp said.

Programs related to “Past Presence” will provide participants with opportunities to share their histories and memories as part of the exhibition. At 3 p.m. Feb. 20, Stepp and fellow Spencer intern Rachel Quist will lead a writing workshop to explore how stories of the past shape present realities. Participants will have an opportunity to record what they write and upload it to the museum’s app, where it will be featured as additional exhibition content. Another recording session will take place from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Feb. 29 at Lawrence

Public Library. This session will encourage participants to share personal stories inspired by works of art in the Spencer Museum's collection. Both programs are free and open to the public.

"Past Presence" will remain on view through June 21. The exhibition and related programs are supported by KU Student Senate.

Related Programming

Feb. 20

Writing Workshop: Penning the Past

3-5 p.m. / Spencer Museum of Art, Kemper Balcony

Sharpen your writing skills while exploring how the stories we tell about the past shape our current realities. Spencer Museum interns Sara Stepp and Rachel Quist lead writers of all levels through a series of exercises prompted by works on view in "Past Presence." Bring your favorite device or notebook and we'll provide free pencils and coffee. Following the workshop is an opportunity to record what you've written to share in our app and the exhibition "Past Presence."

Feb. 29

Activity: Past Forward Recording Session

9:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m. / Lawrence Public Library, Sound + Vision Studio

Can a work of art prompt memories of your past that resonate with life today? Chat with Spencer Archivist Robert Hickerson and explore works of art from the museum's collection that might spark personal meaning for you. Then record your story to share in our app and in the exhibition "Past Presence."

March 12

Gallery Talk: Senior Session: Past Presence

10:15-11:15 a.m. / Spencer Museum of Art, Kemper Balcony

Sara Stepp, a doctoral candidate in art history and curatorial intern at the Spencer Museum, offers insights into the ways that artists reckon with, reflect on, deconstruct and reimagine history to make connections between the past and the present. Senior Sessions are designed for senior citizens but open to everyone.

April 19

Gallery Talk: The Flipside: Past is Prologue

2-3 p.m. / Spencer Museum of Art, Kemper Balcony

Shakespeare's phrase "what is past is prologue" from his play "The Tempest" suggests that history sets the stage for the present. What happens when artists intervene and reimagine the past or illuminate hidden histories? The Flipside takes you behind the art with Spencer intern Sara Stepp for a history-twisting study of key works in the exhibition "Past Presence." Following the talk is an opportunity to record a personal story prompted by a work of art to share in the museum's app and the exhibition.

Image: Craig Barber, "Mekong Central," 1998, Spencer Museum of Art, the University of Kansas, Museum purchase: Museum of Art Acquisition Fund, 2000.0010

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