

September 10, 2021

Spencer Museum of Art

Update on vandalism of artwork

Dear friends,

We at the Spencer Museum of Art wanted to provide more information about the recent vandalism of the "Native Hosts" public art installation by Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds and respond to questions and concerns we have received, and express our apologies for the delay in communication while we gathered more information.

We are saddened and troubled by the damage to this artwork and also for the impact that damage has had on our KU and Lawrence communities. We particularly want to acknowledge the harm this has caused Native faculty, staff, students, and community members and remain committed to affirming Indigenous and Native sovereignty and experiences through art.

Four of the five "Native Hosts" panels in front of our building were affected. These panels were bent and knocked loose and one of them fell to the ground. Spencer staff temporarily removed these panels from display to prevent further damage. The fifth panel remains on display.

KU Public Safety, which is leading the investigation into this incident, reviewed video footage and determined that this damage occurred on the evening of September 4. We are collaborating with Public Safety to identify the individuals involved and we urge investigators, administrators, and everyone else on campus to understand this incident with the seriousness it deserves.

These works of art carry many possible meanings: acknowledgment of Native peoples who currently or historically reside on the land where KU exists; the creative work of a highly distinguished Native American KU alum; an expression of an Indigenous person's creativity that belongs on this campus and deserves our respect; public art that is intended as a thought-provoking and educational experience for all who encounter it.

We are committed to reinstalling this work as quickly as possible. We have been in conversation with Edgar Heap of Birds, as well as many campus partners, and are grateful for their support. We are working closely with the artist and these partners to determine appropriate next steps. We will continue to provide updates as they are available and look forward to celebrating the reinstallation of these panels with you all.