

Spencer Museum's 'Native Fashion' exhibition explores diversity, ingenuity of Indigenous style and dress

[KU news.ku.edu/news/article/spencer-museums-native-fashion-exhibition-explores-diversity-ingenuity-of-indigenous-style-and-dress](https://news.ku.edu/news/article/spencer-museums-native-fashion-exhibition-explores-diversity-ingenuity-of-indigenous-style-and-dress)



An installation shot of the Spencer Museum's Perkins Central Court featuring work by contemporary Indigenous designers. Photo credit: Ryan Waggoner, Spencer Museum of Art

LAWRENCE — “Native Fashion,” which opens Sept. 1 at the Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas, explores the diversity and ingenuity of wearable artworks produced by Native people from the 19th century into today. The exhibition, which represents over 40

tribal nations, features traditional garments, contemporary couture and streetwear, and an expansive array of accessories, including jewelry, bags and other adornments.

“Native Fashion” is curated by Sydney Pursel (Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska), the Spencer Museum’s curator for public practice, in collaboration with a team of Native community advisers: Christina Haswood (Diné), Alicia Swimmer (Oglala and Sicangu Lakota), Felicia Miner (Cheyenne River Sioux) and Miranda Bradford (Citizen Potawatomi Nation). Elena Theresa (Apache Tribe of Oklahoma) and Dominique Stringer served as curatorial interns.

“The all-Native advisory board was instrumental to the development of the exhibition themes and the artist selection, which includes many local Indigenous designers,” Pursel said. “I am particularly excited to have the opportunity to present local artists alongside those who are nationally recognized to capture the incredible talent in our home region and reflect the depth of diversity among Native makers.”

The exhibition examines the importance of fashion and adornment to historical and contemporary culture as expressions of tribal, personal, political and collective identity. The role of fashion is explored in four overarching themes:

- “Resilience” explores Indigenous innovation and resourcefulness in the use and development of materials and techniques.
- “Representation” celebrates the diversity of tribal nations and features various styles of traditional and contemporary dress, discusses Indigenous representation in popular culture and explores the differences between cultural appropriation and appreciation.
- “Resistance” examines the impact of colonization, government policies and activism on Indigenous identity and dress, including the ways in which activist groups utilize wearable symbols for awareness and solidarity.
- “Relations” highlights connections between people and place and how traditions, styles and designs are passed down through generations.

In addition to the exhibition, the Spencer Museum will host a runway show Dec. 14 at the Kansas Union to highlight contemporary Native fashion and celebrate Native designers from the region. More details regarding the runway show will be shared in the coming months.



Teri Greeves, “Spider Woman/Emerging Woman,” 2015, Collection of the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Johnson County Community College, Overland Park.

“Native Fashion” will remain on view through Jan. 5, 2025. Admission to the Spencer Museum and this exhibition is free for everyone.

The exhibition and related programming are supported by the Kansas Arts Commission; the Lawrence Cultural Arts Commission and the City of Lawrence; the Association of Art Museum Directors; the KU Racial Equity Research, Scholarship & Creative Activity Fund; KU Student Senate; the KU Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging; Friends of the Art Museum; the Linda Inman Bailey Exhibitions Fund; the Judith M. Cooke Native American Art Fund; and donations from Mary Beth and Patrick Musick, Kevin and Deb Boatright, and Elizabeth Schultz.



Jodi Webster, “Skoden,” 2023, Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, museum purchase: Barbara Benton Wescoe Fund, 2023.0107, image courtesy of the artist.

Related programming

Curating Native Fashion

Noon-1 p.m. Sept. 10, Spencer Museum of Art

Curator Sydney Pursel and members of the all-Native advisory committee discuss the curation of the “Native Fashion” exhibition.

Artist Talk: Mona Cliff

3-4 p.m. Sept. 25, Spencer Museum of Art

Join Lawrence-based artist Mona Cliff to learn more about the fabric mural she created for the “Native Fashion” exhibition.

Cherokee Basket Weaving Demonstration

1-4 p.m. Oct. 26, Spencer Museum of Art

Join basket weavers Lisa LaRue-Baker and Lula Smith as they create traditional Cherokee baskets. Watch them work, ask questions and touch material samples.

Ribbonwork Artist Panel

1-3 p.m. Nov. 16, Spencer Museum of Art

Learn about the process, symbolism and styles of ribbonwork from artists Jancita Warrington, Leona Antoine, and AJ Holder, whose work is featured in the exhibition “Native Fashion.”

Cara Romero: Following the Light

6-7 p.m. Nov. 21, Spencer Museum of Art

A special screening of "Cara Romero: Following the Light," created for PBS by Mountain Mover Media. Following the 27-minute film, artist Cara Romero and filmmaker Kaela Waldstein join virtually for discussion and Q&A.

Native Fashion Runway Show

4-6 p.m. Dec. 14, Kansas Union Ballroom

Celebrate Native fashion as local and national Indigenous designers showcase their creations on the runway. This event is open to the public and is suitable for all ages. Free tickets are required. Visit the [Spencer Museum website](#) closer to the event for more details.