

ARTS & CULTURE

'Bold Women' thrills

Expansive exhibition explores powerful art that has much to say



Sandra Brewster, *Salome Bey*, 2021, Museum purchase: Helen Foresman Spencer Art Acquisition Fund, 2024.0130

AS SHE GUIDES her visitor through a series of images of the art to be featured in the then-upcoming "Bold Women" exhibition—varied in format, style, size, medium and message—Spencer Museum of Art curator Susan Earle gains energy with each passing slide. Her enthusiasm makes clear that "Bold Women" will likely require numerous visits for museumgoers to even begin comprehending its depth and expanse.

Pausing on a series of photographs by Canadian artist Sandra Brewster, Earle points out the "gel transfer" technique that Brewster used to imply both motion and anonymity. Brewster, Earle explains, was raised in Ontario, Canada, by her Guyanese immigrant family, and offers her art as commentary on Black migrants and the Caribbean diaspora.

"This is a whole new approach to a kind of portraiture and artists sharing their own identities or others' identities," Earle says during the winter-break interview with *Kansas Alumni*. "She calls the series 'Blur,' and the whole idea is to obscure people's identities so they don't feel like they're being watched. It's inspiring to see how an artist has been innovative with materials, and their whole approach to create space for people to not be subjected to the gaze of others, or the gaze of colonialism."

"Bold Women," which runs through July 6, has been years in planning and perhaps represents something of a career capstone for Earle, curator of European and American Art, who for three decades has helped the Spencer Museum evolve and mature in the art it chooses to acquire and exhibit and the thoughtful discussions it hopes to foster within a campus art museum.

With about 80 works by 40 artists—most of whom are contemporary women of color from diverse global backgrounds—"Bold Women" will grace the Spencer's three third-floor galleries and the fourth-floor Marshall Balcony. A rich calendar of spring and summer programs includes a gallery talk by South African artist-in-residence Mary Sibande—whose stunning work "Sophie-Ntombikayise," a resin and fiberglass sculpture draped in brilliant textiles—is already a highlight of the museum's permanent collection.

Large-scale pieces certain to grab visitors' attention include "Twister #2," by Lawrence resident Hong Chun Zhang. Earle describes the work as an "East meets West hair tornado, with a wonderful sense of both the landscape of Kansas but also her exploration of hair as personal identity." A floor-to-ceiling work, Faye HeavyShield's "blood" speaks to the artist's connections to the land and her ancestors in Canada's Blood Tribe.



Earle



Hong Chun Zhang, *Twister #2*, 2012, Museum purchase: Peter T. Bohan Art Acquisition Fund, 2013.0189

"This has been about looking for bold visions, artists who are visionaries and who represent themes of justice in a variety of ways," Earle says. "We're trying to center on the work of women of color, because we feel they have been the innovators. They are the ones who are keeping knowledge. They are the ones who are passing down wisdom and justice, and they are trying to enact that while the patriarchy, or something, keeps crowding it out. You know, even in a museum setting, it often is still getting crowded out. "I think the boldness of the work, the visual

strength of the work, is a mirror of its message and its power."

Earle was assisted in planning "Bold Women" by a diverse group of advisers, including Lawrence textile artist Marla Jackson, '87, whose work will be included in the show; Kansas City arts advocate Rose Bryant; Kimberli Gant, curator of modern and contemporary art at the Brooklyn Museum; and Toronto-based Anishinaabe-kwe Indigenous art curator and artist Wanda Nanibush, along with graduate interns and other KU students. Her work was also supported by numerous grants from varied organizations, including the National Endowment for the Arts and the RC Kemper Jr. Charitable Trust and Foundation.

Those planning to visit the exhibition during its extended run should take note that KU now offers free museum parking on the first level of the Mississippi Street garage, immediately to the right of the garage entrance. Take your license plate number to the museum's welcome desk to get your parking validated.

—CHRIS LAZZARINO

SOCIAL WELFARE

Farewell, Twente

Social Welfare relieved to share law school's Green Hall home

ON THE LAST TUESDAY of fall classes, as a cold breeze whistled across the ridge of Mount Oread, Twente Hall silently weathered one of its final days as an academic building in the heart of campus. The hall, which opened in 1932 as Watkins Memorial Hospital and in 1974 became the first home of the School of Social Welfare, warmly embraced its few final visitors with free pizza in the foyer.

The old building's shortcomings, though, were immediately apparent. Windows in the second-floor conference room were wide open, and most of the faculty and staff still roaming the halls were wearing T-shirts. Shorts, had they been workplace-appropriate, would not have been out of the question.

"The ability to adjust the temperature," says Michelle Mohr Carney, the school's dean, "doesn't exist anymore."

University Architect Mark Reiske, a'86, explains that Twente's chiller and air handler are both "end of life," as are steam traps and condensate returns. "The combination of those two things," he says, "has meant that there's only a very, very small time of year when they could control the temperature in their spaces."

Even so, the lack of proper heating and cooling seems almost

beside the point as compared to the rest of Twente's shortfalls. Designed as a hospital, the space from interior hallways to the exterior walls was suitable for patient rooms but not classrooms. Or conference rooms. Or a student lounge. Each office had its own bathroom, hospital-room style, but plumbing had long since failed, and what had been a perk—private bathrooms for all!—became awkward closets. The front entry, in fact, was the hospital's waiting room, and the free pizza was set out as enticement for faculty and staff to clear out their offices.

"The thing with this building is, it's built for isolation, for keeping sick people away from other people," says Assistant Dean Kristin Trendel, g'96. "It's not a space that was built for collaboration or interaction."

Those shortcomings are now, thankfully, history. During winter break, the School of Social Welfare moved across campus to the third floor of Green Hall, home of the School of Law. Any lingering sense of loss over leaving Twente was likely only about missing out on the springtime eruption of color by the spectacular tulip magnolia trees near the building's entrance.

Now, Social Welfare finally has classrooms. Two, in fact, as well

"Bold Women"

Feb. 18-July 6
Spencer Museum
of Art
spencerart.ku.edu