

Beach Museum of Art unveils 'Rural America' exhibition exploring small-town stories

By [Abbigail Marshall](#)
[Office of the President](#)

Tuesday, Aug. 26, 2025

On Sept. 2, the [Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art](#) at Kansas State University will unveil “Rural America,” a new exhibition offering visitors an intimate look into the shared stories of America’s small towns.

Featuring works from historic and contemporary artists including Ernest Williams Watson, Mary Huntoon, Thomas Hart Benton, Brian Maxwell, Jeremiah Ariaz and John Steuart Curry, the exhibition presents an unflinching depiction of rural life, showcasing both its strengths and challenges.



Thomas Hart Benton, "Meeting House," 1942, egg tempera and opaque watercolor on paper, 18 3/4 x 25 7/8 in., 1954.1

“There’s something powerful about seeing how artists capture rural life — not as nostalgia, but as a lived experience full of complexity,” said Kent Michael Smith, director of the Beach Museum of Art. “This exhibition offers a chance to reflect on the varied realities that shaped rural communities and continue to resonate today.”

Exploring themes ranging from the decline of small farms and closure of local businesses to the progress found within community events and historic preservation, the exhibition will feature printed, drawn and painted works. Running through Sept. 26, 2026, visitors can experience “Rural America” in two installations, aligning with the fall and spring semesters of the 2025-26 academic year, in the Ruth Ann Wefald Gallery.

Elizabeth Seaton, curator of the exhibition, noted that public programming accompanying the works will explore some of the concerns many communities face and how they are responding to them, offering additional opportunities for community connection.



Charles Leroy Marshall Sr., "Auction Day at Waverly, Ks.," 1989, watercolor with graphite on paper, 22 3/16 x 30 3/16 in., gift of Charles L. Marshall, Sr., presented by Maybelle M. Scheetz, 2005.245

Public programs will discuss "Rural America" exhibition

The public is invited to learn more at the following free related programs:

- Let's Talk Local Newspapers with Photographer Jeremiah Ariaz, 5:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 2, in the UMB Theater at the Beach Museum of Art.
- Hungry Heartland: Exploring Food Deserts in the Breadbasket, 5:30-7 p.m. Thursday, April 16, 2026, in the UMB Theater at the Beach Museum of Art. Conversation with K-State faculty and students in the art department, A.Q. Miller School of Media and Communication, and social transformation studies department.

The Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art is at 701 Beach Lane at the southeast corner of the K-State campus in Manhattan. Opened in 1996, the museum is dedicated to connecting regional art, culture and communities, with a mission to collect, preserve, research and present the visual art of Kansas and the surrounding region.

Through exhibitions, educational programs and campus and community partnerships, the Beach Museum of Art serves as a vital cultural resource for students, scholars and the broader public. Its hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays; 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Thursdays; and 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturdays.

Admission is free, and free parking is available adjacent to the building. Visit the museum's [website](#) for livestream events and online exhibitions, view special programs on the museum's [YouTube channel](#) and receive information on programs and events through the [calendar](#).

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For media

Media contact: Division of Communications and Marketing, 785-532-2535, media@k-state.edu

Website: <https://beach.k-state.edu/>