

K-State News

Beach Museum of Art exhibition explores use of art in Kansas schools

Thursday, Aug. 17, 2023



"WPA Cutting Down a Tree," this 1938 opaque watercolor and graphite on paper piece by Ethel Spears, was allocated to Topeka High School and is part of the "To the Stars Through Art: A History of Art Collecting in Kansas Public Schools, 1900-1950" exhibition, which opens Aug. 22 at Kansas State University's Beach Museum of Art. | [Download this photo.](#) (</media/images/aug23/To-the-Stars-Through-Art-Spears.jpg>)

MANHATTAN — A new exhibition at the Kansas State University [Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art](https://beach.k-state.edu/) (<https://beach.k-state.edu/>) brings together historic artworks collected by K-12 schools and emphasizes their importance as educational resources for schools and local communities.

"To the Stars Through Art: A History of Art Collecting in Kansas Public Schools, 1900-1950" opens Tuesday, Aug. 22, in the Beach Museum of Art's Marion Pelton and Hyle Family galleries, and it features 70 paintings and prints from more than a dozen schools, colleges and history museums across the state.

The exhibition is the first survey of art collecting by schools in Kansas and the first study of art acquired by the nation's public schools to give attention to a boarding school for Indigenous students.

Featured artists include Blackbear Bosin, Norma Bassett Hall, Birger Sandzén, Ethel Spears and Walter Ufer. Sandzén, from **Lindsborg**, was a driving force in the historic campaign to bring original artwork to Kansas schools.

Elizabeth Seaton, Beach Museum of Art curator, said the exhibition's title was inspired by the state motto — "ad astra per aspera," or "to the stars through difficulty" — and alludes to the challenge of keeping the arts in the forefront of education.

"One goal of the 'To the Stars Through Art' exhibition is to show the vital role American art played — and might play again — in Kansas schools and their communities," said Seaton. "A prominent theme is the heavy community involvement in the campaign to bring original artwork into Kansas schools. The exhibition also seeks to guide Kansas schools in caring for their collections and using art for educational enrichment."



This 1920 oil on canvas painting by Birger Sandzén, "Rocks and Cedars," is usually on display at McPherson USD 418. It will be in the Hyle Family Gallery at the Beach Museum of Art as part of the "To the Stars Through Art" exhibition. | [Download this photo. \(/media/images/aug23/To-the-Stars-Through-Art-Sandzen.jpg\)](/media/images/aug23/To-the-Stars-Through-Art-Sandzen.jpg)

Kansas counties represented in the exhibition include Cowley, Douglas, Johnson, Labette, Marshall, McPherson, Riley, Saline, Shawnee, Trego, Sedgwick, Wilson and Wyandotte.

The museum is hosting several special events related to the exhibition. The [Sue Jean Covacevich Educators Conference: Inspiring Students Through Art Collecting \(https://events.k-state.edu/event/the_sue_jean_covacevich_educators_conference?utm_campaign=widget&utm_medium=widget&utm_source=Events\)](https://events.k-state.edu/event/the_sue_jean_covacevich_educators_conference?utm_campaign=widget&utm_medium=widget&utm_source=Events) will take place from 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 4, at the Beach Museum of Art.

There will also be a livestreamed conversation with Nicole Grabow, director of preventive conservation at the Midwest Art Conservation Center, and Sarah Price, collections manager at the Beach Museum of Art. The conversation, "[Best Practices for the Care of Art in Schools \(https://events.k-state.edu/event/livestream_conversation_best_practices_for_the_care_of_art_in_schools?\)](https://events.k-state.edu/event/livestream_conversation_best_practices_for_the_care_of_art_in_schools?)

[utm_campaign=widget&utm_medium=widget&utm_source=Events](#))," will occur at 5:30 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 16.

The exhibition is organized by Seaton in collaboration with regional scholars and museum curators. Funding for the exhibition is provided in part by Humanities Kansas, a nonprofit cultural organization that connects communities with history, traditions and ideas to strengthen civic life.

"To the Stars Through Art: A History of Art Collecting in Kansas Public Schools, 1900-1950" can be viewed through May 11, 2024.

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[Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art \(https://beach.k-state.edu/\)](https://beach.k-state.edu/)

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