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A cowboy at heart: Beach Museum of Art exhibition explores John Steuart Curry's fascination with the American West

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"The Code of the West," a 20-by-40-inch oil on canvas by John Steuart Curry from 1923, is featured in the exhibition "John Steuart Curry: The Cowboy Within" opening Sept. 24 at Kansas State University's Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art. Curry created the illustration for author Zane Grey's serialized story "The Code of the West," featured in the July 7, 1923, edition of The Country Gentleman. The work was a gift to the Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas by Mrs. Ben Hibbs in memory of her husband. | [Download this photo.](#)

[\(/media/images/sept19/code_of_the_west.jpg\)](/media/images/sept19/code_of_the_west.jpg)

MANHATTAN — One of the most noted artists to come from Kansas will be featured in a first-of-its-kind exhibition at the [Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art \(https://beach.k-state.edu/\)](https://beach.k-state.edu/) at Kansas State University.

Using drawings, paintings, magazines and books from the Beach Museum of Art's collection and from several lenders, "John Steuart Curry: The Cowboy Within" is the first exhibition to survey Curry's vision of the American West. The exhibition opens Tuesday, Sept. 24, and runs through March 21, 2020, in the museum's Marion Pelton Gallery.

Curry gained national recognition during the Great Depression with Thomas Hart Benton and Grant Wood as a member of the so-called Regionalist Triumvirate. These artists raised in the Midwest — Curry in Kansas, Benton in Missouri, and Wood in Iowa — led a movement in American art characterized by naturalistic

depictions of the local scene. Raised on a farm in northeast Kansas, Curry is best known for his images of rural Kansas: isolated farms, religious gatherings, approaching storms.

"But another region revealed in his art, the American West, has always deserved more attention," said Elizabeth Seaton, co-curator of the Curry exhibition with Frank Owings Jr., an independent scholar. Seaton is a curator at the Beach Museum of Art, which is home to a major collection of Curry works.

A childhood scrapbook shows a boy under the spell of a Wild West pictured by artists such as Frederic Remington and Charles M. Russell, Seaton said. During the 1920s Curry illustrated serialized magazine stories about western ranch owners and cowboys. Later, Seaton said, Curry would develop imagery for editions of classic books set in the West such as James Fenimore Cooper's "The Prairie" and Mary O'Hara's "My Friend Flicka."

During the 1930s the artist interpreted westward expansion in murals for U.S. agencies charged with law enforcement, land management and relations with the country's indigenous population.

"Experiences on his family's second ranch in Arizona nurtured Curry's love of the Western desert and mountains, where he camped and painted," Seaton said. "The West — as a romantic environment of the past and a real locale for exploration and respite — played an important role in shaping the man and his art. Curry may have been a Kansas farm boy at heart, but he had a touch of the cowboy within him."

"John Steuart Curry: The Cowboy Within" is accompanied by an 80-page catalog with an introduction by William H. Truettner, Smithsonian American Art Museum emeritus curator and author of the 1991 book, "The West As America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier."

Several related events are planned with the Curry exhibition; all are free and the public is welcome:

- Art in Motion Western-Themed Kickoff Event will be 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 28, at the Beach Museum of Art.
- "Exodusters Go West: The Settlement of Nicodemus, Kansas," a talk by Angela Bates, the executive director of the Nicodemus Historical Society, will be at 5:30 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 14, at the Beach Museum of Art. Nicodemus is the only remaining western community established by African Americans after the Civil War.
- "John Steuart Curry: The Cowboy Within," a talk by Elizabeth Seaton, curator at the Beach Museum of Art, will be at 2 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 16, at the Volland Store near Alma. More information is available at thevollandstore.com.
- "The Old Chisholm Trail," a talk by Jim Hoy, professor of English at Emporia State University, will be at 5:30 p.m. Thursday, March 5, at the Beach Museum of Art.

Major support for the "John Steuart Curry: The Cowboy Within" exhibition is made possible by the Beach-Edwards Family Foundation, Dan and Beth Bird, the Greater Manhattan Foundation's Lincoln and Dorothy I. Deihl Community Grants Program and the Frank N. and Patricia L. Owings Foundation Inc. Additional support provided by the Archie and Dorothy Hyle Family.

The Beach Museum of Art, at 14th Street and Anderson Avenue, is open Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Thursday from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.; and Saturday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission is free and free parking is available adjacent to the museum.

Source

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Website

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

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