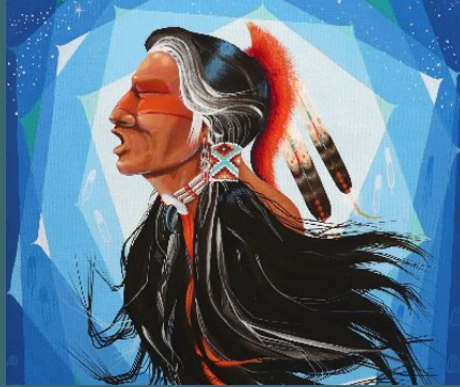


A QUEST FOR HISTORIC ART IN KANSAS SCHOOLS



A team of regional scholars and museum curators led by Curator Elizabeth Seaton have been researching **the history of art collecting by Kansas K-12 schools**. The topic has propelled them around the state in search of treasures in classrooms, district offices, and school board rooms.

Find out about exhibition tours and public programs at <https://beach.k-state.edu/participate/>

School art collecting in Kansas began as **a grassroots movement to bring original art to the state's youth**. In 1911 the district superintendent in McPherson organized a fundraising exhibition to acquire artwork for a new high school. This ticketed event became an annual one, allowing the McPherson schools to establish a significant collection of works by American and international artists, among them James Abbott McNeill Whistler, Walter Ufer, Birger Sandzén and Fern Coppedge.

Before 1950 schools in dozens of Kansas communities, including a boarding school for Indigenous students, joined McPherson in acquiring art. Seaton and her collaborators have brought together their research in **a 2023-2024 exhibition that features 65 works acquired by more than a dozen school districts**. The stories attached to these collections are varied: community exhibitions like McPherson's, bequests from the Carnegie Foundation, artwork distributed as part of New Deal arts programs, and more.

A goal of the exhibition is to **guide Kansas schools in caring for their collections and using art for educational enrichment**. A Nov. 4, 2023, conference for educators and digital humanities website will aid this effort.

Exhibition: *To the Stars Through Art: A History of Art Collecting in Kansas Public Schools, 1900-1950*

Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art, Kansas State University
August 22, 2023 – May 11, 2024

MARIANNA KISTLER
BEACH
MUSEUM OF ART

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PROJECT COLLABORATORS/ADVISORS

- Bethany Janssen, Curator, Wichita Public Schools Art Collection
- Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery, Lindsborg
- Chapman Center for Rural Studies, Kansas State University
- Cynthia Mines, McPherson Schools Art Collection Advisory Board
- Kara L. Heitz, Kansas City Art Institute
- Indigenous Faculty and Staff Alliance, Kansas State University
- Mike Brotherton, Labette Community College, Parsons
- Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation, Mayetta
- Travis Campbell, Haskell Indian Nations University, Lawrence
- USD 465 Winfield Public Schools Foundation
- Wichita Art Museum

Major sponsors: Friends of the Beach Museum of Art and The Alms Group
Sustaining sponsor: Humanities Kansas, a nonprofit cultural organization that connects communities with history, traditions, and ideas to strengthen civic life.

Media Sponsor: KANSAS! Magazine



Front: Ethel Spears, *WPA Cutting Down a Tree*, ca. 1938, WPA Federal Art Project, Illinois, allocated to Topeka High School, Kansas State University, Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art, gift of Ted and Kathy Clark in memory of Myra Diehl Clark, 2016.30 (detail); Blackbear Bosin, *Nermernuh/Ka'igwu (Comanche/Kiowa), Spirit of North Wind*, 1977, Wichita Public Schools, USD 259, North High School (detail); Birger Sandzén, *Rocks and Cedars*, 1920, McPherson USD 418, Board of Education Room

This page: Mike Brotherton, retired English professor, Labette Community College, and Kara Heitz, lecturer in history, Kansas City Art Institute, examine photographs of artwork the Carnegie Foundation provided to the college and the affiliated Parsons High School during the 1930s. The Carnegie's "Fine Arts Set" also included original prints, books and art reproductions.