

By Barbara Waterman-Peters

GREAT ART DESTINATIONS

A renowned Kansas artist shares her picks for must-see galleries and museums across the state

Pentiful and scattered over the state, art museums, university art galleries, art centers and commercial art galleries are accessible to everyone. They can be found in our larger cities. They are tucked away in our smaller towns. Some were started with the dream to bring culture to an area, some to celebrate the work of local talent, others to be a repository for a wonderful collection, but all of them offer something of tremendous value to each of us and to all of our families. These institutions should be a source of great pride for every Kansan.

The galleries and museums in this list represent very different approaches to art. The venues in Lincoln and Greensburg provide a rich art experience by any standard but just happen to be in very small towns. Others, such as The Grassroots Art Center in Lucas, champion delightful folk art and the outsider artist.

Many of the centers benefit from a relationship with one of our state's fine universities that have both major art museums and art galleries in the art departments themselves. The University of Kansas hosts the Spencer Museum of Art; Kansas State University holds the Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art; Wichita State University houses the Ulrich Museum; and Washburn University has the Mulvane Art Museum.

Stand-alone institutions such as the Wichita Art Museum and the Coutts Museum of Art in El Dorado are funded by public and private sources.

Libraries traditionally have art exhibits, but the Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library contains the separate Alice C. Sabatini Gallery that boasts a permanent collection and mounts national exhibits. And the old Carnegie Library in Dodge City has become The Carnegie Arts Center.

Some cities such as Lawrence, Salina and Hays have arts centers that not only feature interesting exhibits but also have programming for other arts events.

Educational programs, tours, docent positions, film showings, panel discussions, artist talks, outreach programs, performances, and other opportunities make our art venues vibrant and engaged with communities. In times of reduced funding, these determined entities continue to thrive.

My list of 20 galleries presents only a sample of what is available. Experienced owners and young artists alike curate venues across the state and share their vision and enthusiasm for the power of art. Two entities, the Hutchinson Art Center and Mark Arts, which was formerly the Wichita Center for the Arts, are currently being constructed or renovated. These are upcoming openings you definitely will not want to miss.

Whatever your taste in art, I would urge you to include an hour or two at a museum, gallery or art center whenever you visit a town in Kansas. Most have websites or Facebook pages, so checking open hours or finding their contact information is simple. Admission is usually free, but a small donation or purchase from the gift shop or sales gallery would be appreciated.

As a practicing artist, of course I believe in the power of art to transform us, to give us a new perspective, to help us understand our situation in life. Art gives us so much and asks in return only that we value and interact with it. Visiting any of these venues, and the many others in our state, affords a chance to do that.

OPPOSITE Montage with details from Edward Hopper, *Conference at Night* (1949), oil on canvas.

ABOVE CLOCKWISE Exterior of Baker Arts Center; detail of Mary Cassatt, *Mother and Child* (about 1890), oil on canvas; interior of Wichita Art Museum.



BAKER ARTS CENTER
624 North Pershing Avenue
(620) 624-2810
bakerartscenter.org

LIBERAL

A private home converted into a public art gallery upon its opening in 1986, the center has exhibited the work of artists whose expression tends to be in traditional media. It houses a permanent collection of art and a library of thousands of books and art portfolios. School tours, art and music workshops and artist-in-residency programs for schools are among its educational offerings. Expansion plans include live performances and theater productions.



WICHITA

WICHITA ART MUSEUM
1400 West Museum Boulevard
(316) 268-4921
wichitaartmuseum.org

Located close to the Arkansas River, this institution houses more than 8,000 objects and focuses on American art. Works by well-known artists such as Mary Cassatt, Thomas Eakins, Edward Hopper, John Singleton Copley and Charles Russell span several centuries of American painting. Works on paper include artists Red Grooms and Faith Ringgold. An extensive collection of glass and Pre-Columbian art adds variety to the museum's offerings.

CITYARTS
334 North Mead | (316) 350-3245
wichita-cityarts.squarespace.com

Found in the heart of Old Town and supported by the city of Wichita, CityArts plays a unique role in providing arts education and exhibit opportunities for all. Through both on-site and outreach classes and through its four gallery spaces, the center serves an important role as a focal point for the visual arts in the state's largest town.

LAWRENCE

LAWRENCE ARTS CENTER

940 New Hampshire Street | (785) 843-2787
lawrenceartscenter.org

Originally housed in a Carnegie library, this anchor of Lawrence is now in a new building with five beautiful exhibition spaces, a 300-seat theater, studios and classrooms. Specializing in the visual and performing arts, the Lawrence Arts Center has 120 teachers who share their knowledge in various art forms, including ballet and modern dance, with as many as 10,000 students each year.

SPENCER MUSEUM OF ART

1301 Mississippi Street | (785) 864-4710
spencerart.ku.edu

In its splendid and newly renovated building, this museum has a huge collection of more than 40,000 works from many genres. Because of its location on the University of Kansas campus, the museum focuses on research and teaching, but its exhibitions and events enable it to accommodate, educate and engage its 100,000 annual visitors.



GREENSBURG

5.4.7.

204 West Wisconsin Avenue | (620) 723-2600
547artscenter.org

This gallery is the first Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Platinum building in Kansas. That alone makes it worth a visit, but it also hosts exhibits, classes and performances.



HAYS

HAYS ARTS CENTER

112 East 11th Street | (785) 625-7522
haysartscouncil.org

Something is always happening at this venue. Whether it is a prestigious exhibition, such as the 5 State Photography Competition or the annual Smoky Hill Art Exhibition or an invitational show, wonderful art is always on the walls. The venue is part of the Hays Arts Council, which contributes to regional creativity by hosting programs such as its long-running writing contest open to kindergarten through 12th grade students across Ellis County.

MOSS-THORNS GALLERY AT FORT HAYS STATE UNIVERSITY

600 Park Street, Rarick Hall 115
 (785) 628-4247 | fhsu.edu

Known by its present name since 1987, this beautiful gallery is home to student and faculty exhibits as well as traveling shows. It is named after two former chairs of the art department, one of whom had envisioned the art building many years before. Very interesting art comes out of this department, so it's sure to be worth a visit.



LINDSBURG

BIRGER SANDZÉN MEMORIAL GALLERY AT BETHANY COLLEGE

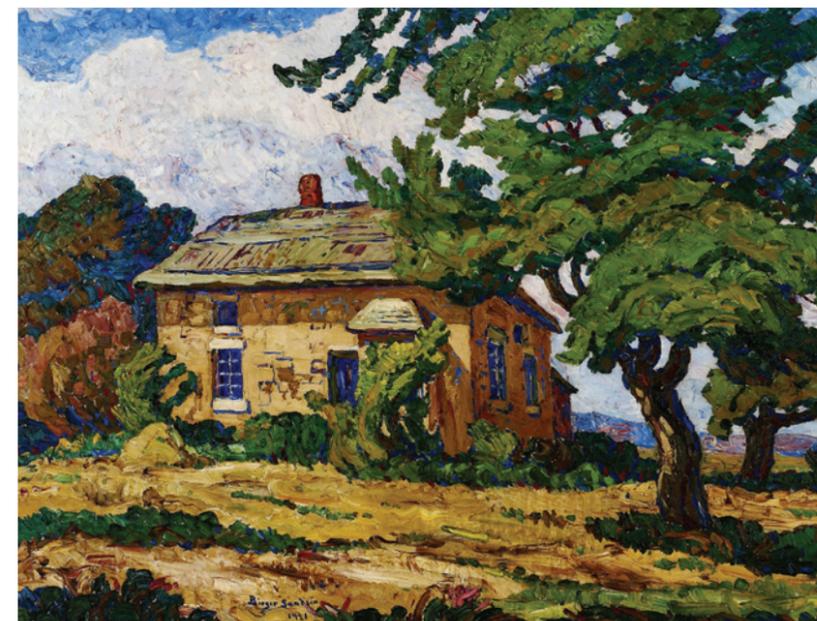
401 North First Street | (785) 227-2220
sandzen.org

A must-see for anyone who loves the work of Birger Sandzén, this institution has the largest collection of works by its namesake Kansas master. However, its permanent collection, building on donations of other collections since 1957, is an impressive gathering of works by 720 other artists. The museum hosts exhibits of contemporary artists from the region and beyond, including an intriguing theme show that attracts artists from across the state.

RED BARN STUDIO

212 South Main | (785) 227-2217
lesterraymer.org

Once the home and workplace of the versatile artist Lester Raymer (who designed and built this studio almost entirely out of wooden architectural salvage), this gallery is now run by a volunteer society that has opened the gallery to the public since 1997 and hosts visiting artists. The core attraction remains the work left by Raymer, who had a seemingly unending set of skills in wood, paint, metal, clay and fiber. His fabulous magic realism paintings hang next to wooden sculptures. Not to miss are the toys he created each Christmas for his wife.



EL DORADO

COUTTS MUSEUM OF ART

110 North Main Street
 (316) 321-1212
couthmuseum.org

A collection of more than 1,500 works of art originally consisting of European, Russian, Chinese and South American pieces that were acquired by Warren Hall Coutts, Jr, but recent acquisitions include art from the American West and Midwest.

RUSSELL

DEINES CULTURAL CENTER

820 North Main Street
 (785) 483-3742
deinesculturalcenter.org

In 1989, the Deines family donated a substantial body of work by one of its members, a huge building and a large monetary gift to the city of Russell. These gifts have become a cultural center that features monthly exhibits of regional artists, traveling exhibits, recitals, readings and an education component, such as ceramics workshops. Always on exhibit are the wonderful wood engravings by E. Hubert Deines.

Art gives us so much and asks in return only that we value and interact with it.

—Barbara Waterman-Peters

OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT Interior of Spencer Museum of Art, Exterior and interior of 5.4.7
ABOVE Interior of Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery, Birger Sandzén, *Old Homestead* (1921), oil on canvas.

PHOTOGRAPHS (CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT) Michael C. Snell, Courtesy 5.4.7 (2), Courtesy Ron Michael/Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery, Courtesy Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery

TOPEKA

MULVANE ART MUSEUM

1700 Southwest Jewell Avenue
(785) 670-1124
washburn.edu

Named for its first benefactor, Joab Mulvane, this museum opened to the public in 1924 and continues as one of the oldest art museums west of the Mississippi. More than 4,000 objects are included in the collection that features not only exquisite international pieces but also a large part of the holdings from the work of Kansas and Mountain Plains region artists. The museum also houses another jewel, the Judith Lennox Sabatini ArtLab, which provides hands-on and creative art experiences for children of all ages.

ALICE C. SABATINI GALLERY

1515 Southwest 10th Avenue | (785) 580-4515
tscpl.org/gallery

Inside the beautiful Michael Graves-designed Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library sits this rare gallery with a permanent collection of more than 3,000 objects. It is the oldest public art collection in the capital city. Ranging from paintings to paperweights and contemporary ceramics, it also includes southwest reliquary woodcarvings and 19th-century Chinese decorative arts. Exhibits showcasing this permanent collection are mounted alongside juried national shows such as the Topeka Competition and Printed Image.

HUTCHINSON

HUTCHINSON ART CENTER

405 North Washington Street
(620) 663-1081
hutchinsonartcenter.net

Even though it is closed for renovation at the moment, this art center believes in strength in numbers. It has pulled together individual arts organizations with the common goal of encouraging community participation in the arts. Gallery exhibits of local and regional artists as well as recognition of literary achievements in the area are included in the program. Hoping to reopen later in 2017, this great space will continue its mission.

GREAT BEND

SHAHER GALLERY AT BARTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

245 Northeast 30 Road
(620) 792-9342
bartonccc.edu

This marvelous gallery, also known as the L.W. "Gus" and Eva Shafer Memorial Art Gallery, is home to exhibits of local, regional and national artists as well as a permanent collection that includes pieces by one of its namesakes, Kansas sculptor Gus Shafer.

PHOTOGRAPHS (CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT) Courtesy Alice C. Sabatini Gallery, Courtesy Hutchinson Art Center, Courtesy Salina Art Center, Courtesy Kansas Wesleyan University (2), Courtesy Alice C. Sabatini Gallery (2)

SALINA

SALINA ART CENTER

242 South Santa Fe
(785) 827-1431
salinaartcenter.org

Nationally known for its novel programming, this nonprofit contemporary art and education organization has three distinct venues: exhibition, education and administration; a theater; and a warehouse for visiting artists to live in and create work. Excellent programming, including an artist mentoring opportunity and cinema for independent films, keeps this center at the forefront of new art in Kansas.

GALLERY AT KANSAS WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

Sams Hall of Fine Arts
(785) 833-4383
kwu.edu

This intimate space is almost a stage set with its low lighting and warm, gray walls. While most art department galleries focus on students' work, this one expands that mission to give students and the community an opportunity to view and interact with the thought-provoking output of Kansas artists.

LINCOLN

LINCOLN ART CENTER

126 East Lincoln Avenue
(785) 524-3241
lincolncenter.org

With a relaxed atmosphere and interesting art always on view, this venue is well worth driving the few miles off I-70. Every other month, the center opens a new exhibition with a gallery talk and reception. Artists are invited to apply for an exhibition slot. Maintaining a large gift gallery, it offers a wide selection of artist-created works that are a delight to choose from. A small permanent collection is an added attraction.



OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT Christopher Brennan, *Intersection Thoughts* (2002), oil on canvas; exterior of Hutchinson Art Center; interior of Alice C. Sabatini Gallery; Rodney Troth, *Coming Rain* (2003), oil on canvas, oil pastel
ABOVE Interiors of Salina Art Center; interiors of Gallery at Kansas Wesleyan University

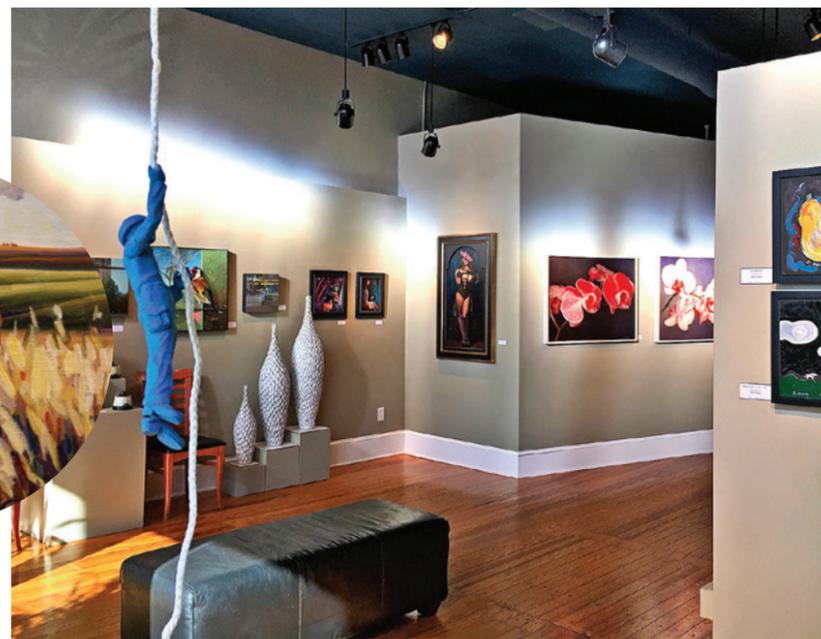
**MARIANNA KISTLER
BEACH MUSEUM OF ART**
14th Street &
Anderson Avenue
(785) 532-7718
beach.k-state.edu

Celebrating its 20th year in 2016, this museum has already undergone its first expansion. An extensive collection of more than 7,000 works features Kansas and regional art, including many works on paper, and enables staff and visitors to explore the rich history of the visual arts in Kansas. The Prairie Print Makers, including such names as John Steuart Curry and Birger Sandzén, are well-represented; painters include Lester Raymer and Robert Sudlow. Glass artist Dale Chihuly's huge orange chandelier hangs over the staircase.



STRECKER-NELSON GALLERY
406½ Poyntz Avenue | (785) 537-2099
strecker-nelsongallery.com

Opened in 1999 and continuing the tradition of the Strecker Nelson Gallery, this wonderful art venue moved to its second location upstairs in a larger building downtown. From its beginning, this gallery has shown the very best of contemporary Kansas and regional artists. Eventually, the First Floor Gallery annex welcomed visitors directly off the street. Besides the impeccably displayed art, the nicest attractions have always been the welcoming smiles and great atmosphere.



ABOVE Interiors of Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art; interiors of Strecker-Nelson Gallery; detail of Kristin Goering, *Tallgrass* (2016), acrylic on canvas

OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Saralyn Reece Hardy; Lisa Grossman, *86 Bends of the Kaw* (2004), relief-roll woodcut, silk tissue, mulberry paper, wood panel, rice paste, PVA glue and chine collé; Roger Shimomura, *American Citizen #1* (2006), color lithograph; Wendell Castle, *Hanging in the Balance* (2002), bronze, jelutong wood



A CONVERSATION WITH SPENCER MUSEUM OF ART DIRECTOR SARALYN REECE HARDY ABOUT THE ROLE OF GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS IN SETTING UP GREAT MEETINGS BETWEEN FINE ART AND FINE KANSANS.

Born and raised in Scandia, Spencer Museum of Art Director Saralyn Reece Hardy is proud of her deep Kansas roots that helped launch her career. She was director of the Salina Arts Center for many years and held the position of director of museums and visual arts at the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington, D.C., before she joined the Spencer in 2005. Newly renovated and recently reopened, the Spencer is part of the University of Kansas and serves both faculty, students and the public. It houses a collection that reflects what Reece Hardy describes as one of an art museum's most important objectives: to be an open and integral part of the community. We sat down recently with Reece Hardy to discuss the role of public galleries and art venues in Kansas.

KANSAS! (KS): WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE A PREMIER ART MUSEUM IN KANSAS?

SARALYN REECE HARDY (SRH): I think the definition of "premier" has changed somewhat. It still means that there is a rigorous process at work in thinking about what comes into the museum, an intellectual and aesthetic standard, but I now think also it has to be relevant to people. It is part of the job of the museum to be sure that when people come in they can find something that speaks to their own lives. The importance of the museum is not only that it is a treasure house, I think it's a place for experience, too. When significant important objects come together with a dedication to the importance of the audience, that can be "premier." We have to care very much about audiences.

KS: WHAT IS THE ART MUSEUM'S PURPOSE IN THE DIGITAL AGE?

SRH: We were very early pioneers in digitizing our collections. You can look online and see an enormous database of all of our objects. You can see a photo of it, when we acquired it and what it's made of. Our baseline level is making our collections available to people. What we've all learned in museums is that this does not in any way replace the real object. It actually develops an appetite for the real object, and then you go and appreciate it more fully.

KS: HOW DO YOU ATTRACT YOUNG PEOPLE TO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES?

SRH: I think the word "relevant" is an especially apt one because when you're on a college campus you have to be thinking about young people all the time. And "freshness"—the art museum has to remain fresh. I think the way to do that is to be a much more responsive place, not a place that is always delivering a message of one kind or another that is crafted in isolation, but having the idea of

co-creating with our students and talking with young people that come in about what they like to see and what interests them. I think that the mission of commissioning new work helps keep an art museum relevant.

KS: WHAT COMMITMENT DO YOU HAVE TO KANSAS ARTISTS?

SRH: We have a lot of Kansas artists represented in our museum. Even though we're comprehensive—we cross all places and all times in our collection—that doesn't mean you can ignore the place you are in. A museum like the Spencer can showcase a Kansas artist in the context of an international perspective. That's not only great for our audiences, it's also useful to others who are looking at our collection to see how an artist who's working in Kansas may be looking at the world through eyes similar to someone who lives in a very different part of the world.

KS: WHAT ARE THREE OF YOUR FAVORITE WORKS BY KANSAS ARTISTS AT THE SPENCER?

SRH: Wendell Castle, *Hanging in the Balance*. This is one of my favorites because it's very eloquent about the fragility of life and the tenuousness that you feel. Roger Shimomura, *American Citizen #1*. Roger is one of those artists who always brings social questions very strongly into his work. Lisa Grossman, *86 Bends of the Kaw*. This is a favorite because it communicates the beauty of the natural world and the artist's concern about the environment. **KM**

—Interview conducted, transcribed and condensed by Mary R. Gage.



PHOTOGRAPHS (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) Courtesy Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art (2), Michael C. Snell, Courtesy Spencer Art Museum (3), Courtesy Strecker-Nelson Gallery (3)