



Spencer Museum of Art Receives \$1.35 Million Gift to Endow Education Position

J.K. & Ingrid Lee Foundation gives funds to support key role dedicated to cross-disciplinary learning and direct engagement with works of art

Lawrence, KS (March 18, 2024)—The Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas today announced that it has received a \$1.35 million gift from the J.K. & Ingrid Lee Foundation to endow the position of Learning Engagement Coordinator. In collaboration with curatorial and leadership teams, the Learning Engagement Coordinator is responsible for developing programming and overseeing object-based learning for the Spencer’s recently opened Ingrid & J.K. Lee Study Center. The approximately 1,300-square-foot Lee Center includes open artwork storage that allows for direct interaction with artworks and supports a wide range of learning opportunities for students, faculty, visiting researchers, and the public. The gift ensures the Spencer’s ability to maintain a position dedicated to the Lee Center and reflects a shared commitment to its importance in enacting the museum’s mission and vision.

The Ingrid & J.K Lee Study Center opened to the public in November 2022 as part of a \$4 million project that included a major redesign of the Spencer’s fourth-floor collection galleries. The establishment of the Center was also supported by a \$900,000 grant from the J.K. & Ingrid Lee Foundation and named in recognition of the essential grant. J.K. Lee was a transformational presence in the University of Kansas Chemistry Department. He joined the faculty in 1956 and brought much needed support for both graduate and undergraduate analytical teaching. From 1970 to 1980, he served as associate chairman for the department, during which time he was an unwavering leader and visionary promoter for faculty and staff activities.

The multi-purpose Lee Center features rotating installations of works from the Spencer’s collection, with a special focus on its extensive Asian art holdings. It currently features 60 objects on long-term display and has allowed for more than 400 works to be placed on temporary exhibition to support classroom visits and programs. Large, moveable drawers and cases provide new close-up access to objects, enabling greater study and engagement for audiences and creating opportunities for innovative program development. To date, the Center has hosted more than 70 university and K-12 class visits. The Center has also facilitated the creation of distinct programming such as the monthly Textile Tuesdays, through which the public has an opportunity to experience sensitive textiles from the collection that would be otherwise difficult to display.

“The Lee Center is the newest flexible teaching and learning space at the Spencer, joining the previously created Brosseau Center for Learning and the Goddard Study Center. These environments are essential to the Spencer’s educational mission, enabling us to create distinct experiences for students of different ages

and across areas of study, as well as for the public, to directly engage with works in our collection,” said Saralyn Reece Hardy, the Marilyn Stokstad Director at the Spencer Museum of Art. “Making art accessible in this way has a transformational impact and creates pathways for new research methodologies and lifelong learning through the arts. We are grateful to the J.K. & Ingrid Lee Foundation for sharing so exuberantly in our vision, by first providing essential funding for the establishment of the Center and now for endowing the position that assures our ability to fulfill our programmatic priorities for the space.”

The position of Learning Engagement Coordinator is currently held by Jennifer Holdman. She is responsible for developing and carrying out the vision for the Ingrid & J.K. Lee Study Center, in coordination with museum leadership. This includes supporting object presentations in the space, engaging University faculty and area educators with the opportunities that the Center offers, and facilitating class visits, research visits, tours, and a wide range of public programs. Holdman has a background in educational programming and visitor engagement. She holds an M.A. from KU in Museum Studies and a B.A. in art history, classical studies, and history from Southern Illinois University.

“I have witnessed firsthand the value of the Lee Center, which comes, in part, from the exceptional staff who enliven the space with art and a broad range of learning opportunities,” said Ingrid Lee. “My family and I are proud to endow this position at the University of Kansas and the Spencer Museum of Art, ensuring that someone will continue to support the work of the Center and fulfill its educational purpose in perpetuity. We look forward to the many dynamic programs the Center will host and the meaningful research that it will spur.”

The Spencer has a long history of ambitious, interdisciplinary research and learning initiatives. As early as the 1970s, museum leadership began advocating for educational models that integrated art across curriculum study. A groundbreaking vision for the role of the arts at the time, this approach has become a standard at many universities across the United States. Over the decades, the Spencer has continued to experiment in its vision of connecting art with science, technology, and the humanities, leveraging its resources to establish new ways of learning. In recent history, this has resulted in the creation of Art Research Integration (ARI), an innovative program that brings artists into a wide range of research processes through interdisciplinary collaborations. The learning and study centers at the Spencer further this vision, inviting students from across a wide range of disciplines to engage with the arts as a central mode of learning and encouraging a broad public, with a spectrum of backgrounds and experiences, to find inspiration and meaning through close and dynamic encounters with art.

About the Spencer Museum of Art

The Spencer Museum of Art, located on the University of Kansas Lawrence campus, explores the intersection of art, ideas, and experiences. With a diverse collection of more than 48,000 works, the Spencer is the only museum in Kansas with contemporary and historic artwork in all mediums from cultures across six continents. The Spencer Museum facilitates arts engagement and research through exhibitions, artist commissions and residencies, conferences, performances, lectures, children’s art activities, and arts and culture festivals. Admission to the Spencer Museum of Art is free.

About the University of Kansas

The University of Kansas is a major comprehensive research and teaching university. The university's mission is to lift students and society by educating leaders, building healthy communities and making discoveries that change the world. The KU News Service is the central public relations office for the Lawrence campus.

About KU Endowment

KU Endowment is the independent, nonprofit organization serving as the official fundraising and fund-management organization for KU. Founded in 1891, KU Endowment was the first foundation of its kind at a U.S. public university.

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