

# Spencer Museum of Art Collection Plan 2022–2027

## Introduction: Art at Our Core

Art is at the center of all the Spencer Museum of Art does. Art guides our mission and serves as a foundation for research, teaching, and exploration for learners of all ages. Art fosters a more inclusive understanding of the human experience and catalyzes conversations around pressing issues of our time.

The Spencer Museum’s diverse collection, which includes more than 47,000 works of art spanning 5,000 plus years of human history across six continents, is the core of the institution. As stewards, we care for the collection in ways that ensure its preservation for future audiences. We are also responsible for intentionally shaping the collection, through thoughtful growth and winnowing, to address the needs of the many communities we serve. Collecting forms a part of our work with artists and communities, through forms of engagement and potential directions for collecting.

This collection plan is intended to provide an intellectual and practical framework for developing the Spencer Museum of Art’s collection in ways that further our mission, support our strategic priorities, resonate with our audiences, and align with physical spaces. As such, it serves to offer guidelines for a dynamic practice. This plan extends from October 1, 2022 through September 30, 2027. More specifically, this plan seeks to:

- Identify shared institutional priorities for collections growth to guide new acquisitions;
- Articulate tangible goals for honing the collections through research and deaccessioning; and
- Define common values around responsibly developing and sustaining the Museum’s collections.

Ultimately, this plan aims to clarify the role of the collection in fulfilling the Museum’s mission and to make decisions related to collections development more transparent to Museum staff and external stakeholders, including University partners, potential donors, and other communities who use our collection to explore new ideas, support research, and inspire new work. It is one of several documents that guide the Museum’s decision-making, and is meant to complement, strengthen, and extend the strategic plan, comprehensive interpretive plan, and collection management policy.

## Audience

This plan has been developed first and foremost for Museum staff to use as a framework to guide discussions around shaping the collections. However, the Strategic Priorities for Collection Development were written with the intent that they could be shared, fully or partially, with the Museum’s audiences as a way to openly share our collecting goals and priorities over the next five years.

## Process

The first draft of this plan was written by Cassandra Mesick Braun (Curator of Global Indigenous Art) in June 2022 after extensive feedback from Museum staff from all departments. This feedback came in many forms, including anonymous surveys, in-person meetings, and virtual discussions. The process was also shaped by developments happening in the art museum field as a whole. The final version was discussed and further edited based on feedback from staff from across Museum departments.

## Intellectual Framework: A Vision for Our Collection

The Spencer Museum of Art simultaneously serves as a comprehensive art museum, a center for higher education, a cultural resource for learners of all ages and backgrounds, and a catalyst for research and ideas. The Museum has identified several institutional goals as part of its most recent strategic plan to help fulfill these multiple roles, and each of them guides the vision for our collection: to serve as a resource for students, researchers, artists, and the community to learn about the world in inclusive, broadly accessible, and creative ways.

- **Activate Art:** We aim to share a diverse collection that encourages all to investigate enduring questions about the world. To do so, the Spencer Museum must continue to collect works of art that reflect multiple histories, viewpoints, and experiences, including those that have not been widely addressed in art museum contexts. It also requires that we responsibly make these collections available to as wide an audience as possible through exhibitions, public programs, our Study Centers, and digital platforms.
- **Inspire Inquiry:** We position the Museum as a place for collaboration, interdisciplinary exchange, and the dissemination of artistic research. The collection remains vital to the teaching, research, and collaborative discovery the Museum enables and must be part of the active generation of artistic scholarship, creative inquiry, new ways of thinking, and diverse forms of knowledge. To do so, the works we steward must be able to respond to the research agenda of the University and Museum staff, the interests of artists we collaborate with, and the needs of diverse public audiences who use our collections to continue learning.
- **Stimulate Engagement:** We seek to provide multifaceted opportunities for diverse community engagement and participation. The Museum aims to use its collection for active discovery and exploration. Works of art should be used to promote dialogue, inspire civic action, address issues that are both timely and enduring, and resonate with many publics.
- **Enhance Organizational Adaptability:** We will strengthen internal systems and capacity to achieve long-term stability while remaining adaptable and responsive to changes in the field. For the collection, this requires making responsible acquisitions that align with this collection plan and the Museum's collections management policy. It also allows for an openness to considering culturally responsive methods of collections care and cataloging as well as to embrace the challenges that new art forms bring.

## Strategic Priorities for Collection Development

To ensure that the collection continues to achieve the Museum's mission and aligns with the collection management policy, this collection plan highlights six broad strategies that will guide how the collection develops over the next five years. These mutually-agreed upon priorities should be used to evaluate whether to acquire new works and how to most responsibly and effectively steward the collection. These priorities are:

1. To thoughtfully expand the collection by acquiring works that support the Spencer Museum's commitment to fostering diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and belonging (DEAIB). This includes acquiring works that reflect ideas, histories, and voices that have been underrepresented in museums. For the next 5 years, acquisitions will prioritize:
  - Works made by BIPOC artists;
  - Works by women artists;
  - Works by artists with disabilities; and
  - Works by artists who identify as LGBTQ+.
2. To ensure the collection supports the research, exhibition, and programming agenda of the Museum. For the next 5 years, acquisitions may focus on the themes of upcoming exhibitions, ARI inquiries, research projects, community engagements, and interpretive goals for the Museum, including:
  - Artworks that are responsive to community input and collaboration;
  - Artworks that allow for multisensory experience and interaction, especially touch; and
  - New media, performance, and/or more experimental artworks.
3. To ensure the collection can respond to the teaching and research needs of the University through supporting the research, exhibition, and programming agenda of the Museum. Because these needs shift and evolve, it is vital that the collection remain geographically, culturally, and chronologically comprehensive; works that can speak across disciplinary boundaries and to multiple topics are especially vital. However, for the next five years, priorities for new acquisitions should focus on teaching and research topics of recurrent interest, including:
  - Ecology, environment and climate change;
  - Race, social justice, and equity;
  - Biology, medicine, technology, and science; and
  - Colonialism and migration.
4. To acquire works that can be responsibly used in the Museum's physical spaces. Recent renovations bring natural light and introduce the academic suite of study and learning centers into our galleries, both of which will impact the ways we display and share our collections. Over the next 5 years, we will incorporate what we learned firsthand about how these changes affect exhibitions, teaching, research, and programs. We should prioritize bringing into the collection:
  - Works that can safely withstand higher light levels (e.g. collection galleries);
  - Works that can be effectively shared in the Stephen H. Goddard and/or Ingrid and J.K. Lee Study Centers;
  - Works that can be installed in the Brosseau Center for Learning; and/or

- Works that are designed to be in alternative spaces (e.g. Business School, KUEA, KU Field Station).
5. To better understand, document, and share the works of art already in the Spencer Museum's collections. By conducting systematic, deliberate, and ongoing research of collections, we aim to uncover ways to use our existing collection in new ways without acquiring more. Over the next 5 years, this will entail:
- More thorough researching and cataloging of new acquisitions and objects with increasing contemporary relevance by curatorial staff, in close partnership with the collection management team;
  - Improving data in MuseumPlus for objects in all curatorial departments.
6. To deaccession and dispose of works that do not fulfill the Museum's mission. Criteria for deaccessioning and disposal are already well documented in the Museum's collection management policy (CMP). Over the next 5 years, curators will propose works for deaccession and disposal in alignment with the CMP to ease the burden of caring for and storing works that do not enhance the mission. Curators will work in close partnership with the collection management team to execute the disposal of those works. For the next 5 years, priorities for deaccessioning and disposal are:
- Large objects without notable significance that require significant storage space;
  - Redundancies;
  - Works in extremely poor condition; and
  - Non-acquisitioned works that do not align with collection priorities or further the Museum's mission.