

THE JOSLYN

Omaha World-Herald

Get an inside look at Omaha's new Joslyn after two years of renovations

By Betsie Freeman

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Jack Becker, executive director & CEO of The Joslyn Art Museum, talks about reopening the museum after a two-year renovation

A select few have gotten a sneak peek at The Joslyn's new 42,000-square-foot Rhonda & Howard Hawks Pavilion — along with other museum renovations — in advance of next week's grand reopening.



A look at the exterior of The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024. The front lawn has been reimagined as a place for outdoor events such as weddings and parties.

NIKOS FRAZIER, THE WORLD-HERALD

Craig Dykers, the New York-based architect of the \$100 million addition, has been avidly watching their reactions, wondering what they will think of their old friend after a two-year separation.

Will they think it has changed too much?

No, at least according to his initial observations, Dykers said at a Friday tour for about two dozen members of the media from Omaha and beyond.

“People are comfortable, like they’re at home,” he said of the museum’s sneak peekers, expressing relief that he and others behind the project have protected fond memories of the beloved 93-year-old museum.

The lucky folks who have seen the new Joslyn — and the scores who will flock there after it reopens Tuesday at 1 p.m. — are likely to make exciting new memories. The museum has been closed since May 2022 for construction.

In addition to the new pavilion, changes at the museum include:

- Total reinstallation of all collections, the first since the museum opened in 1931.

- 16,700 square feet of new gallery space, a 40 percent increase in display space. Galleries hold a number of new acquisitions, including 52 pieces of contemporary art in the recently acquired Phillip G. Schrager Collection.

- 15,400 square feet of public gathering space.

- A new covered public entrance that opens to a large atrium.

- New gathering spaces and an outdoor terrace.

- A redesigned sculpture garden.

- A new, larger museum shop.

- A redesigned cafe operated by Clean Slate Food Co.

- An atrium that offers views of all three Joslyn buildings: the soaring Hawks Pavilion; the original 1931 art deco building constructed with Georgia Pink marble; and the Walter & Suzanne Scott Pavilion, the museum’s 1994 expansion, which was architect Norman Foster’s first commission in the United States.

The main attractions of the newest pavilion are 10 galleries on the upper floor, accessible from a gently sloping staircase. It has lots of stairs but was surprisingly easy for this aging reporter to navigate. Four of the galleries are devoted to the Schrager collection and six to other contemporary artworks.

The pavilion has a wide hallway facing the outdoors in which some of the sculptures in the Schrager collection are displayed. Jack Becker, The Joslyn’s executive director and CEO, said people passing on Dodge Street can see the sculptures through its glass walls, especially at night.



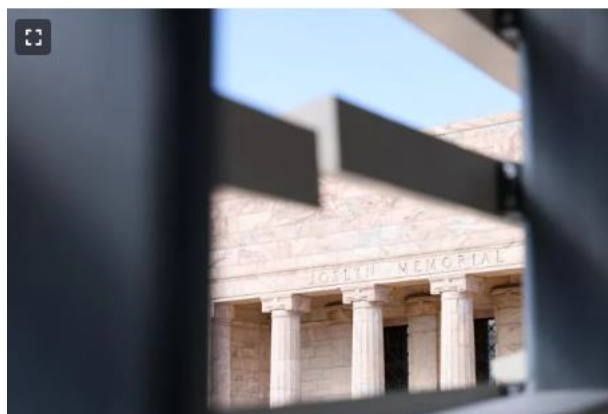
Sunlight shines through windows inside The Joslyn.
NIKOS FRAZIER photos, THE WORLD-HERALD

“It’s a beautiful, joyous space filled with natural light,” he said, adding that the newest addition gives the older buildings “greater stature.”

Artists represented in the Schrager collection include Roy Lichtenstein, Ed Ruscha, Brice Marden, Richard Diebenkorn, Tara Donovan and Morris Louis, among others. A temporary exhibit by Ruscha, an Omaha native whose media include printmaking, drawing and photography, is next door in the museum’s first dedicated works-on-paper gallery. The exhibit will be up through Feb. 23, 2025.

Additional artists represented in the Hawks Pavilion include Sadie Barnette, Amy Sherald and Simone Leigh.

Other contemporary art at the museum has been reinstalled in galleries in the Scott Pavilion, which flows seamlessly from the Hawks Pavilion. It includes a new exhibition of work by Eva LeWitt, who turns items such as mesh netting and silicone into whimsical, unexpected objects, and it also has works by Jackson Pollock and Andy Warhol on display.



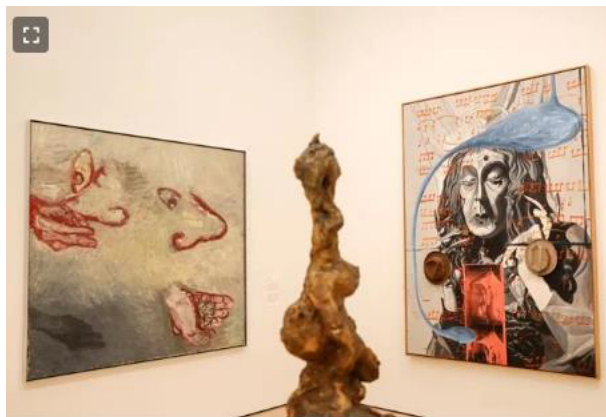
A look at the exterior of The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024.
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Galleries have state-of-the-art LED lighting that in the Hawks Pavilion is enhanced by natural light. Dykers, founding partner of the Snøhetta architecture firm in New York, said natural lighting was essential to his design, “but none of it attacks the paintings.”

They also have ash wood floors. Oak is more common for flooring, Dykers said, but as it turns out, it releases tannins (think wine in oak barrels), which isn’t good for artwork.

The original 1931 building — which, long ago, was the entrance — was also spruced up and has reimagined galleries. Floors were polished and plaster repaired, Becker said. Original columns were buffed up to be as “as smooth as baby skin,” said architect Dykers, who urged tour participants to touch it. (It was, indeed, exceedingly smooth.)

“People say ‘I’ve been coming here for 50 years and this building has never looked this good,’” Becker said.



“Game 7” by Susan Rothenberg, “Gervaise” by Rebecca Warren and “Ashton” by David Salle are seen inside the Rhonda & Howard Hawks Pavilion at The Joslyn.
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Chief Curator Taylor Acosta said the renovation was “a great challenge and opportunity” for curators, who scoured storage areas for previously hidden and potentially interesting pieces of ancient art from Egypt, Greece and Rome, most of which was acquired in the 1930s and 40s.

She pointed to a bust of Herakles (Hercules) that was dated back to from 1 BCE to 3 CE. Museum curators are in the process of testing the marble to figure out its exact origins and have invited scholars and outside curators to study it, she said.

American and Indigenous art from previous centuries is also displayed in galleries in the original building. Acosta said the reinstallation prompted curators to figure out a cohesive way to display that art together rather than separately to tell a more complete and compelling story about American history.

More gathering spaces were also created with the new addition and renovation, Becker said. He was especially animated when talking about an inviting new community room with warm wood trim in the

Hawks Pavilion. It will be available to people from across the Omaha area for meetings, dinners or other gatherings.



Visitors at a media preview of the new Rhonda & Howard Hawks Pavilion and renovated areas at the Joslyn Art Museum walk through galleries on Friday.

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“Some of you may get married in this room one day,” he told the diverse crowd of media representatives.

Three acres of gardens surrounding the museum were also redesigned. One key element is an elevated garden above the entrance in which “Bodacious,” a large, welded stainless steel sculpture by Mark di Suvero, is displayed. The work is part of the Schragger collection, which is visible through the window in a gallery directly above the garden.

Another new feature is a large lawn in front of the original building that can be used for community gatherings.

Michelle Delk, partner and landscape architect at Snøhetta, said she wanted the gardens to reflect Nebraska’s subtly rolling hills and beautiful lush river corridors. She said she also wanted to create a variety of smaller gardens that would expose galleries to the outdoors.

One garden, next to a patio with tables and chairs, displays “Little Big Sister,” a 2024 stainless steel sculpture by Alison Saar. The piece — depicting a girl in a classic pose of defiance — is a nod to students at Omaha Central High School next door.



Craig Dykers, Snøhetta architect, talks Friday about the space outside the Phillip G. Schrager Collection at The Joslyn in Omaha.
NIKOS FRAZIER photos, THE WORLD-HERALD

Dykers, too, considered the character and landscape of the state when he was pondering the pavilion's design. He said he didn't have a vision for the project when it first started out, and the finished product was the result of a design evolution.

The vastness of the state's landscapes inspired him, he said. He had been familiar with Nebraska for a while because he visited as an architecture student to see the original Joslyn Art Museum building and the State Capitol, two structures he had studied.

He had driven across the state at least six times when he was younger, he said, avoiding the Interstate and talking with people in small towns.

He incorporated the state's sweeping landscapes and the way approaching storms look on the Nebraska prairies in the pavilion's design by making it lifted, not grounded, and incorporating the long views of wide-open spaces in the lines of the structure.

"I was inspired by the authenticity of this place (Nebraska) without copying it," Dykers said.

Photos: Take a look inside The Joslyn Art Museum before it reopens



A look at the exterior of The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024.
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Craig Dykers, Snøhetta architect, talks about the space outside The Phillip G. Schrager Collection at The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024.
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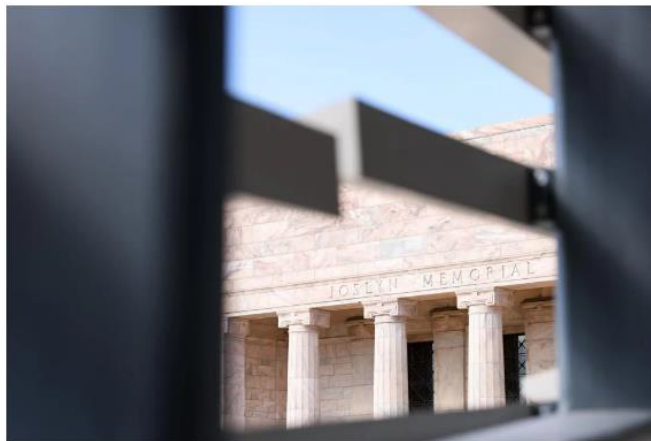
Game 7 by Susan Rothenberg, Gervaise by Rebecca Warren and Ashton by David Salle, all pieces from the Phillip G. Schrager collection, are seen inside the Hawks Pavilion at The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024.
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Sunlight shines through windows inside The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024.
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Jack Becker, executive director and CEO of Joslyn Art Museum, walks through the Phillip G. Schrager Collection with Craig Dykers, Snøhetta architect, during a tour of the Hawks Pavilion at The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024.
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A look at the exterior of The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024.
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A look at artwork inside the Hawks Pavilion at The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024.
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Signs direct guests throughout The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024.
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A look at the new additions to The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024.
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Jack Becker, executive director and CEO of Joslyn Art Museum, talks about the new artwork hanging in the Hawks Pavilion at The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024.

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Craig Dykers, Snøhetta architect, speaks about the design of the new additions to The Joslyn inside the Phillip G. Schrager Atrium in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024.

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Jack Becker, executive director and CEO of Joslyn Art Museum, talks about the new Phillip G. Schrager Collection at The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024.

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Craig Dykers, Snøhetta architect, gives a tour of the new additions to The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024.

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A look at the Suzanne and Walter Scott Pavillion and Bodacious, by Mark di Suvero, outside of The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024.

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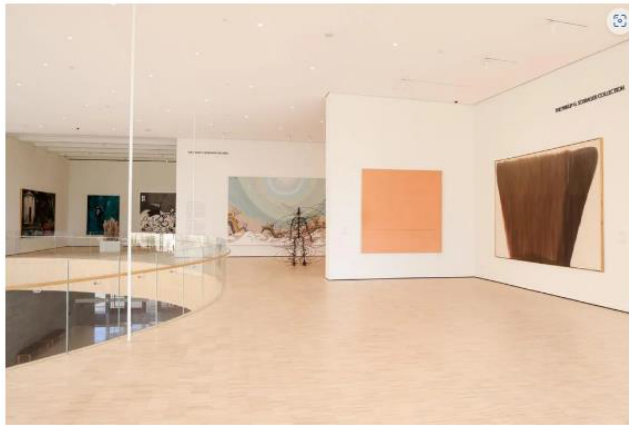
A look at the outside of the new addition to The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024.

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Craig Dykers, Snøhetta architect, talks about the space outside The Phillip G. Schrager Collection at The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024.

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A look at the entrance to the Phillip G. Schrager Collection at The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024.
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A look at artwork inside the Hawks Pavilion at The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024.
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Landscape with Red Roof by Roy Lichtenstein, Untitled by Richard Artschwager and How To Be by Jonatha Lasker all pieces from the Phillip G. Schrager collection, are seen hanging inside the Hawks Pavilion at The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024.
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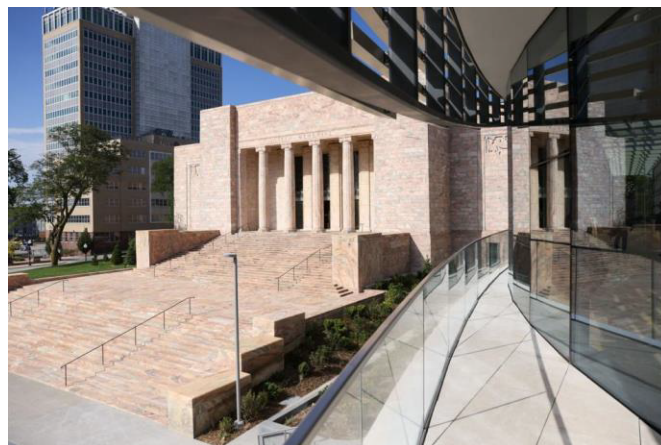
How To Be by Jonatha Lasker is seen hanging in the Hawks Pavilion at The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024. How To Be is part of the Phillip G. Schrager collection.

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Three Girls in a Wood by Kehinde Wiley hangs in the Hawks Pavilion at The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024.

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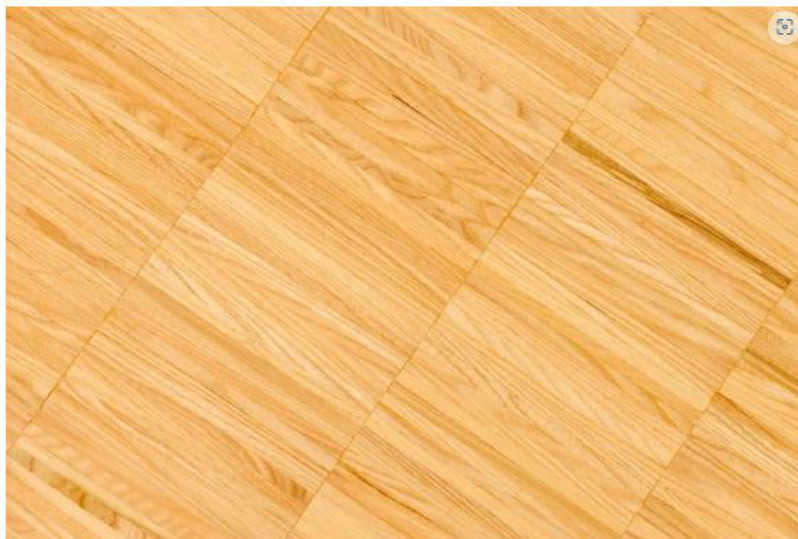


A look at the exterior of The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024.

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A look inside The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024.
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A look at the new hardwood floors in the Hawks Pavilion at The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024.
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A look inside The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024.
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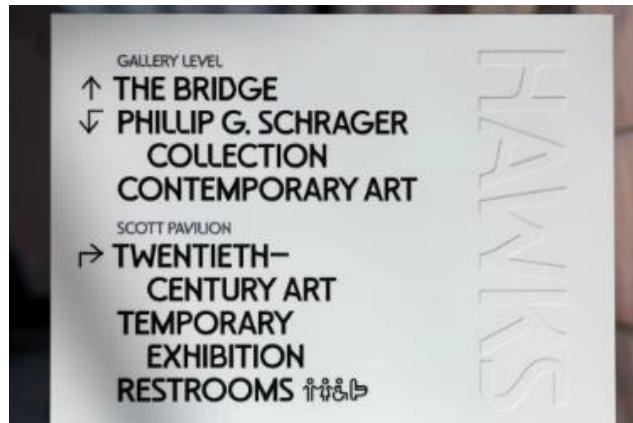
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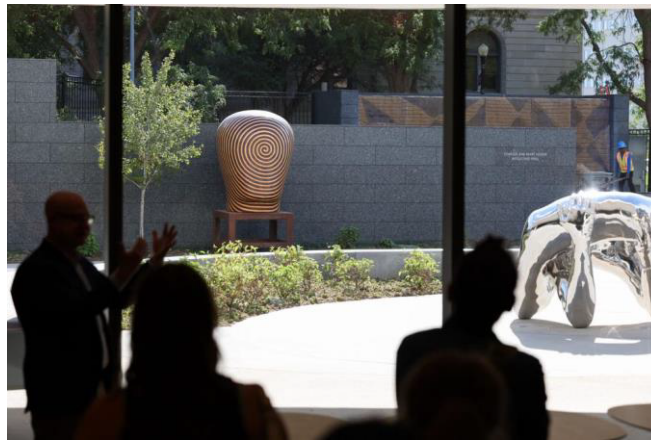
Large Covered Wagon, a sculpture by Tom Otterness, is seen outside The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024.
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Sculptures are seen in the Rhonda & Howard Hawks Pavilion as Jack Becker, executive director & CEO of The Joslyn, gives a tour of the new community room at The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024.

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The Embrace by Hank Willis Thomas is seen in the Rhonda & Howard Hawks Pavilion at The Joslyn in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 6, 2024.

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https://omaha.com/life-entertainment/local/art-theater/get-an-inside-look-at-omahas-new-joslyn-after-two-years-of-renovations/article_481c028e-6c99-11ef-b628-0749dd048eca.html