

THE JOSLYN



Reinstalled collections and reopened museums enhance our experience of Western American art

By Gussie Fauntleroy

Southwest Art

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In a constantly changing world, art museums remain vital and relevant by changing as well. Growing collections and fresh exhibitions are an obvious way to offer new visitor experiences, while longer-term upgrades include the expansion and redesign of museum facilities and the reimagining and reinstallation of existing collections. Here is a look at four important museums in the American West and what their most recent changes can mean for our understanding of art and the stories it can tell.

REOPENED

Hilbert Museum of California Art at Chapman University

Orange, California

hilbertmuseum.org

Ever since 2016 when collectors and philanthropists Mark and Janet Hilbert donated their extensive collection and funding to found an art museum in Orange, California, the couple's—and the museum's—dream has been to expand the original space to more fully honor and present the collection. That dream was realized when the Hilbert Museum of California Art at Chapman University reopened in February 2024 after a multiyear renovation that tripled its size from 7,000 to 22,000 square feet.



Ruth Peabody (1898-1966), Taos Pueblo Scene, ca. 1930, oil on canvas, 32.5 x 40. The Hilbert Museum of California Art at Chapman University, gift of The Hilbert Collection.



Z.S. Liang, Pueblo Street Market in the 1920s, 2006, oil on canvas. The Hilbert Museum of California Art, gift of John Heckenlively, M.D.

The Hilbert houses one of the world's largest collections of California narrative art: 5,000 pieces are in rotation, including oil and watercolor paintings, drawings, illustration, animation and movie art. Now with 26 galleries in two wings, its first significant exhibition changeover in the expanded space reflects many sides of California's colorful, iconic past, from 19th century painters to orange crate labels to original drawings and paintings for films.

Among the exhibitions that opened in 2024 and continue into 2025 are Undiminished: Women Painters of the California Scene (through March 8), 21st Century Realism by California Artists (through April 19), and Disney Classics of the 1950s and '60s (also through April 19) featuring original work by Disney artists from such films as Peter Pan, Cinderella and Lady and the Tramp.



The West Courtyard entry of the Hilbert Museum of California Art at Chapman University featuring the mosaic mural PLEASURES ALONG THE BEACH (1969), by Millard Sheets. Photo: Eric Staudenmaier.

“We pride ourselves on being a storytelling museum,” says Hilbert Museum Director Mary Platt, who co-curated many of the upcoming shows. Platt notes that the larger, redesigned museum already is becoming an iconic landmark itself. With an urban silhouette echoing the surrounding historic industrial neighborhood, the front entrance features a 40-by-16-foot late 1960s Millard Sheets glass tile mosaic depicting Southern California beach life. Rescued from a Santa Monica building slated to be repurposed, the sparkling mosaic was painstakingly dismantled and reassembled at the Hilbert, “an incredible restoration project,” Platt says.

The director believes the museum, now with a community room, research library, café and courtyard, along with greater gallery space, is on track to triple its annual attendance. Yet admission remains free, part of Mark and Janet Hilbert’s promise to make it as accessible as possible. Of the reopened space, Platt says, “It really is a dream come true.”

REOPENED

Joslyn Art Museum

Omaha, Nebraska

joslyn.org

The first thing visitors to the newly expanded Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha, Nebraska, will notice is the addition of a stunning new glass-sided pavilion and entrance, with sweeping lines and a direct connection to the museum’s welcoming landscaping and sculpture gardens. With the Joslyn’s reopening in September 2024 after two years of construction, the 42,000-square-foot Rhonda & Howard Hawks Pavilion added 10 galleries totaling 16,000 square feet of new gallery space, two new studios/classrooms and the integration of three building styles representing important periods in architectural design.



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Yet the changes represent much more than the museum's physical beauty and its ability to showcase its ever-growing collection of art and objects spanning 5,000 years of creativity from around the world. The expansion also provides an opportunity to present the art in ways that can shift our views of the human experience.

In particular, the museum has begun integrating works from its Western American and Native American collections in its reinstalled galleries. The results are displays that “help frame North America as an international place where many cultures have merged and where collective experiences have been formed through exchange, struggle and adaptation,” explains Thomas Busciglio-Ritter, Ph.D., the Richard and Mary Holland Assistant Curator of American Western Art.



Robert S. Duncanson (1821-1872), Falls of Minnehaha, 1862, oil on canvas, 36.375 x 28.125. Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska, Museum purchase, gift of The Sherwood Foundation, 2023.12, Photograph © Bill Ganzel, Ganzel Group Communications, Inc.

Busciglio-Ritter works alongside Annika K. Johnson, Ph.D., the Stacy and Bruce Simon Curator of Native American Art, to weave artworks from the two collections around meaningful themes, including land, identity, community and migration. The gallery dedicated to the American Southwest, for example, explores how Indigenous artists—such as San Ildefonso Pueblo potter Maria Martinez—reinterpreted traditional designs in the 20th century and how their works went on to inspire the aesthetic of modernist painters including Raymond Jonson and Robert Henri.

Joslyn Executive Director and CEO Jack Becker, Ph.D., proudly points to the museum's internationally recognized architecture, which now represents three distinct styles: the original 1931 Joslyn Building, which is an "Art Deco masterpiece"; the high modernist 1994 Walter and Suzanne Scott Pavilion; and the new pavilion designed by Snøhetta, a Norwegian-based global transdisciplinary firm. "It's very exciting seeing how all three buildings come together for this profound, interesting, and beautiful architectural moment," Becker says.

The Joslyn, as it has since its inception, offers free general admission to all.

Reinstalled

Tacoma Art Museum's Haub Collection of Western American Art
Tacoma, Washington
tacomaartmuseum.org

The most well-known works of Western American art inevitably tell an equally well-known story of this region's past. Yet the American West, both past and present, contains many narratives and perspectives, and these other stories, along with the artists telling them, have been mostly missing from art museums.

To move toward amending this omission, the Tacoma Art Museum has produced [re]Frame: Haub Collection of Western American Art, a reinstallation of the collection with four new exhibitions giving voice to diverse and underrepresented segments of Western American culture and history. "It's important to tell the stories of the American West that are not often presented in museums," notes Tacoma Art Museum's Director of Curatorial Jessica Wilks. To do so, three of the guest curators drew from the Haub Collection—whose focus is major Western artists from the 18th through the 21st centuries—and combined these pieces with works on loan by contemporary artists.

The fourth exhibition, Blackness is...the Refusal to be Reduced (through March 14, 2027), by guest curator Nikesha Breeze, features work in a variety of media by six contemporary guest artists. It does not draw from the Haub Collection because "there was nothing in the collection" to reflect the African American experience, Wilks says, underscoring the need for the reinstallation.



Mian Situ, *The Entrepreneur—San Francisco*, 2006, oil on canvas, 44 x 54. Tacoma Art Museum, Haub Family Collection, Gift of Erivan and Helga Haub, 2014.6.126.

Chinese immigrants are the subject of *Finding Home: The Chinese American West* (through September 5, 2027). From the collection, major Mian Situ paintings are joined by works from other contemporary Chinese American artists to explore the “spiritual, the mythical and the laborious path of these seekers of the American dream...,” notes guest curator Lele Barnett.



Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986), *Piñons with Cedar*, 1956, oil on canvas, 30 x 26. Tacoma Art Museum, Haub Family Collection, Gift of Erivan and Helga Haub, 2014.6.91.

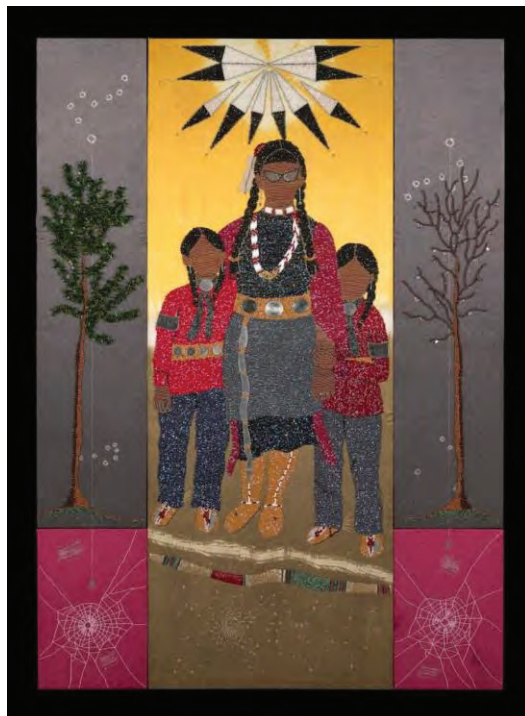
Nepantla: The Land is the Beloved (through September 6, 2026) offers the perspectives of artists who identify with the Arab diaspora in the United States, themselves an ethnically and culturally diverse population. And The Abiqueños and the Artist (through May 31, 2026) juxtaposes the Abiquiu, New Mexico, of Georgia O'Keeffe fame with the story of the Genízaro peoples, whose Indigenous ancestors were enslaved by the Spanish and lived for centuries in the Abiquiu area.

“What I love about each of these exhibitions is they really are telling stories and broadening perspectives of the art of the American West,” Wilks says.

Reinstalled

Denver Art Museum's Indigenous Arts of North America Collection
Denver, Colorado
denverartmuseum.org

In considering how to meaningfully celebrate the 100th anniversary of its Indigenous Arts of North America Collection in 2025, the Denver Art Museum decided to reinstall a significant portion of the collection and produce a special opening exhibition, in addition to anniversary programming scheduled throughout the year. “Native people have been on this continent for millennia. To celebrate such a short date [100 years] just didn't seem to do justice to their continuing presence and powerful contributions to every aspect of our society, including arts and culture,” remarks Dakota Hoska, the museum's Associate Curator of Native Arts.



Teri Greeves (Kiowa), *Sons of the Sun*, 2023, beads, raw silk and dye on canvas, 96 x 72. Denver Art Museum, purchased with the Nancy Blomberg Acquisitions Fund for Native American Art, 2023.777A-E. © Teri Greeves.

Along with reinstalling 8,000 square feet of the permanent collection space on the third floor, South Tower of the Lanny and Sharon Martin Building, the museum presents SUSTAINED! The Persistent Genius of Indigenous Art, opening December 22 and on view for approximately two years with a rotation after 12 months to change out light-sensitive materials. Both the exhibition and reinstallation focus on three major elements that have sustained Native peoples throughout time: beauty, connections and spirituality. Hoska, who served as the show's organizing curator, with advice from Native community members and the museum's Indigenous Advisory Council, notes that beauty incorporates Native artworks and a way of being in the world. Connections encompass family/relatives and ancestors, as well as connections to food sovereignty and specialized ecological knowledge. And spirituality includes the sacredness of children, the passing down of important stories, and celebrating through ceremony and dance.



Norval Morrisseau (Anishinaabe), *Untitled (Snakes)*, about 1970, acrylic on paper board, 40 x 32. Denver Art Museum, Native Arts acquisition fund, 2010.441. © Norval Morrisseau.

“We wanted to be sure anything we presented really reflected the priorities of the community,” Hoska says. This has been the museum’s approach to collecting, conserving, and exhibiting the works of living Indigenous artists since the collection’s inception in 1925, notes Frederick and Jan Mayer Director

Christoph Heinrich. At the time, the DAM was among the first museums in the country to collect Indigenous art of North America and for decades was the only major art museum in the world to focus its attention on Indigenous arts.

Along with SUSTAINED!, anniversary programming features solo exhibitions by two boundary-pushing contemporary Native artists. The first large-scale U.S. exhibition of work by Cree artist Kent Monkman (Fisher River First Nation) opens on April 20. And opening in October 2025, mixed-media visual artist Andrea Carlson (Ojibwe descent) receives her first museum survey.

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REIMAGINED MUSEUMS

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REOPENED HILBERT MUSEUM OF CALIFORNIA ART AT CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY

Orange, California
hilbertmuseum.org

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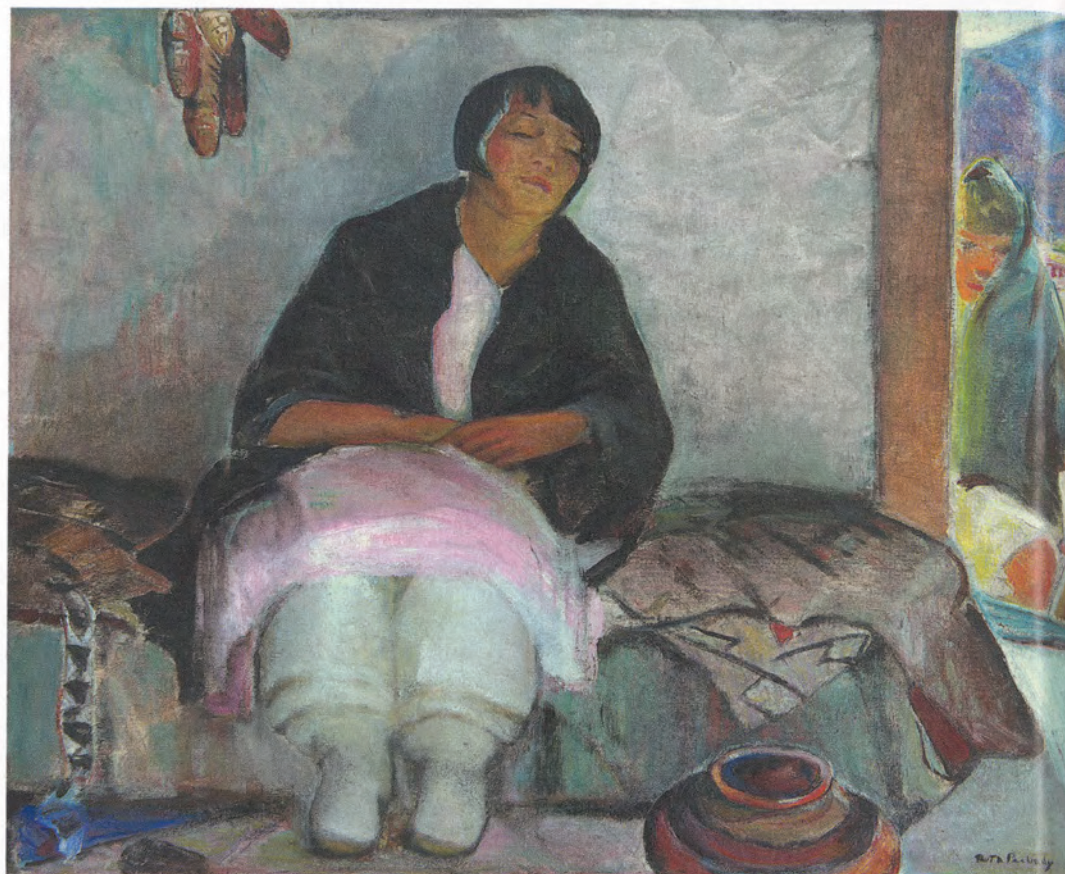
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The West
Courtyard
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ALONG THE
BEACH (1969),
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Photo: Eric
Staudenmaier.

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Attendees gather to view a long-term loan buffalo robe at the Joslyn Art Museum’s newly reopened galleries.

REINSTALLED

TACOMA ART MUSEUM'S HAUB COLLECTION OF WESTERN AMERICAN ART

Tacoma, Washington
tacomaartmuseum.org



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