

THE JOSLYN



Image 1

After reopening, Joslyn Art Museum breaks visitor records, earns national acclaim

The Omaha art museum, after being closed for a serious expansion, is landing on best museum lists and winning awards for its new addition. The public is voting yes with its feet.

Charlie Week | Oct 23, 2025

Jack Becker sees it when visitors lounge on the Joslyn Art Museum's grand steps, built nearly a century ago, and gawk up at the museum's new addition.

He sees it on social media, when Nebraskans and museumgoers from around the country post Instagram worthy photos in the soaring atrium and new pavilion. And the museum director sees it in the large crowds viewing the museum's new 20th century art collection — housed in the new wing of the museum — as art and architecture collide to bring The Joslyn newfound acclaim.

One year in, it looks like early but unmistakable success.

In 2025, its first full year after reopening with the 42,000-square-foot addition, The Joslyn is almost certain to break recent attendance records. It's landing on lists of the best American art museums. Its new building, designed by famed Norwegian architecture firm Snohetta and Omaha's own Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture, is getting international honors.

And Becker sees success in small moments, too, like Creighton University and Omaha Central High School students choosing to study and read in the new atrium.

"The feeling of being in the Hawks Pavilion is hard to describe," Becker says. "The new galleries filled with art ... the moments people are sharing in the museum ... (it) has already been the site of so many experiences. "We have had at least one marriage proposal already. It is truly a special place for everyone."

The Joslyn's new Rhonda & Howard Hawks Pavilion, which opened in September 2024, added 16,700 square feet of gallery exhibition space, 15,400 square feet of public gathering space and new and restored public gardens.



Image 2

It houses the Schrager Collection, a total of 52 pieces of art gifted to the museum by the family of noted art collector Phillip G. Schrager, an Omahan who amassed one of the country's most renowned postwar and contemporary art collections before his death in 2010.

It's also bringing in crowds.

A total of 159,420 visitors had already entered the museum this year through the end of September, according to a museum tally. If that pace holds, The Joslyn will easily surpass 200,000 visitors in 2025.

With another three months' worth of attendance numbers to tally, the museum is already closing in on its 2019 attendance total, its last full year before COVID-19 hit. The museum then closed for two years in 2022 to allow the Kiewit Building Group, [which was awarded the \\$78 million contract](#), to complete the expansion.

And The Joslyn has cleared the 200,000-visitor mark only a few times in its history, museum leaders say. It generally has happened because of a once-in-a-generation traveling exhibit, like when the museum hosted the Tutankhamun Treasures exhibition in 1962 or when it presented the Dead Sea Scrolls exhibition in 1965.

This year, visitors to the newly reopened museum include people from all 50 states and nearly 60 different countries.

"We're delighted to see the museum so active," said Becker, the museum's executive director and CEO who arrived in Omaha to run The Joslyn in 2010. "I think people feel that this is a place where they can come ... it's great to see folks who say it's their first time to an art museum, or the first time to The Joslyn."



Image 3

As the crowds have arrived, so has national attention.

In the past year, The Joslyn has been featured in The Wall Street Journal, Native American Art Magazine, Fast Company and a bevy of other local, regional and national publications.

It has gotten notice from architectural critics and writers as well. The Architectural Record highlighted the role Nebraska's sky played in the design of the Hawks Pavilion. A critic for Wallpaper Magazine acknowledged the difficulty of adding to The Joslyn's campus and lauded the new work. And another critic noted the inspiration that the Hawks Pavilion drew from the Prairie School of architecture, made famous by Frank Lloyd Wright, through the "compression and release" you feel when emerging from the entry canopy into the atrium.

The Joslyn also received awards for its design on a national and international scale. USA Today named it the sixth-best art museum in the United States in 2025, and the Joslyn was one of only two American museums to be selected for the [Prix Versailles](#), an international design competition organized by UNESCO that "shines a spotlight on the best contemporary projects worldwide."

Since reopening, The Joslyn has welcomed several exhibitions, such as floating technicolor installations by Eva Lewitt, Indigenous ribbonwork appliqué works by Henry Payer, 200 years of Japanese prints in the new works on paper gallery and a collection of works by painters like Georgia O'Keeffe, Jacob Lawrence, Kay Sage and others that depict the American railroads over more than a century.

A Made in the Plains exhibition, showcasing the work of 20 Great Plains artists and exploring what "home" means, also included three "Art Conversations & Cocktails" evenings, during which visitors were invited to participate in discussions between the artists and the exhibition's curators. Among the topics: migration, identity and resilience.



Image 4

“Art Conversations & Cocktails” is one of the new programs The Joslyn has launched since its reopening. “The conversation-like gallery experiences are designed to build visual literacy, critical thinking skills and empathy,” said Nancy Round, the Joslyn’s director of learning and engagement.

The museum is also offering two other new public programs, “Nights at The Joslyn” and “Art-Tastic Saturdays,” which coincide with Free Firsts, when the Joslyn provides free admission to otherwise ticketed exhibitions on the first Thursday and first weekend of each month.

The Joslyn has also added two new art classrooms and expanded the museum’s art program as part of its renovation, an addition that Round says will support art education at all stages of life.

“In addition to a wide-ranging menu of classes for preschoolers through older adults, we can now do more hands-on art making with community organizations, school groups and home-school families,” Round said.

The Joslyn will continue to develop its programming, as well as its exhibitions, as it learns lessons from experiments in the first year following its reopening. For Becker, it’s an exhilarating, optimistic time to be at The Joslyn.

“We still have another year of figuring out how things work. How do we seize this opportunity? How do we learn from the first two years of operations, so we understand the new normal? It’s an exciting place to be!”

The museum director says that connecting national and international artists and exhibitions to The Joslyn not only helps raise the museum’s profile but also bolsters Omaha’s reputation as an artistic hub.

“Anything we can do to raise the profile of this institution also helps the community,” Becker said.



Image 5



Image 6



Image 7



Image 8



Image 9

Image Credit

Image 1: The Hawks Pavilion addition to The Joslyn “was unlike anything Kiewit had built before,” project manager Kevin Vrooman said on the Kiewit website. “The two-story, 42,000-square-foot building includes only two 90-degree corners — the remaining elevations are concave and convex curvatures that meet the sloping roof. It all comes together to connect into the two existing buildings.” Courtesy © Nic Lehoux

Image 2: Architects of the Hawks Pavilion wanted to make it appear that the building is floating. Accomplishing that, project manager Kevin Vrooman said, required a complex steel structure. The second floor is suspended from above, and large steel cantilevers extend 40 feet out and above the building’s main level, allowing covered access at the main entrance and the exit to the sculpture gardens. Courtesy © Nic Lehoux

Image 3: Jack Becker, executive director at The Joslyn, speaks during the Omaha museum’s reopening celebration in September 2024 following construction of a massive new addition. Courtesy photo by Ben Semisch

Image 4: The original Art Deco section of The Joslyn was built by a Kiewit team in 1931. The museum was expanded in 1994 with the addition of the Suzanne and Walter Scott Pavilion, also built by Kiewit. Kiewit Building Group then built the Hawks Pavilion, which was designed by the Norwegian and American architectural firm Snøhetta with help from Omaha’s Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture. Courtesy © Nic Lehoux

Image 5: People entering the Joslyn Art Museum are greeted with “a light and airy open space with glass walls and a suspended staircase that leads to new galleries on the second floor,” Kiewit notes on its website. “The entire second floor is also suspended from above.” Courtesy © Nic Lehoux

Image 6: The original Art Deco section of The Joslyn was built by a Kiewit team in 1931. The museum was expanded in 1994 with the addition of the Suzanne and Walter Scott Pavilion, also built by Kiewit. Kiewit Building Group then built the Hawks Pavilion, which was designed by the Norwegian and American architectural firm Snøhetta with help from Omaha’s Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture. Courtesy © Nic Lehoux

Image 7: On the main floor of the Hawks Pavilion, visitors can find a new museum shop, meeting space for up to 100 people and access to the sculpture gardens and the two existing museum buildings. Courtesy © Nic Lehoux

Image 8: The Hawks Pavilion houses the Phillip G. Schrager Collection, which includes 52 paintings, sculptures, photos and drawings. Joslyn says the collection encompasses some of the most significant developments in postwar and contemporary art. Courtesy © Nic Lehoux

Image 9: The design concept behind the Hawks Pavilion addition to Joslyn Art Museum was a structure that would mimic clouds floating over a prairie. Courtesy © Nic Lehoux