

Stephen Friedman Gallery

The Oklahoman
9 must-see attractions at OKC museums to look for during spring break
Brandy McDonnel
19 March 2021



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Spring break has sprung for many schoolchildren, and families looking for safe local outings during the pandemic shouldn't overlook the many museums in the the Oklahoma City area.

Assuming that coronavirus guidelines are in effect, museums are safer than almost any other indoor environment, with a risk of COVID-19 transmission lower than in supermarkets, restaurants and offices, Hyperallergic recently reported, citing a study from the Berlin Institute of Technology in Germany.

Although many central Oklahoma museums have impressive special exhibitions on view for spring, their collections also boast treasures on permanent display that can be seen any time these landmarks are open – and they should be seen in person to be fully appreciated.

1. Kehinde Wiley's "Jacob de Graeff" at the Oklahoma City Museum of Art



Image: "The Oklahoma City Museum of Art purchased Kehinde Wiley's 2018 portrait "Jacob de Graeff," with funds from the Carolyn A. Hill Collections Endowment and the Pauline Morrison Ledbetter Collections Endowment.

The Oklahoma City Museum of Art is rightfully renowned for its expansive and beautiful collection of Dale Chihuly glass art, but it also became home two years ago to this stunning large-scale work by celebrated African-American painter Kehinde Wiley, who famously painted Barack Obama's presidential portrait.

Wiley is best known for recreating paintings by iconic masters but replacing the European aristocrats, saints and generals with people of color, especially young African American men, attired not in ancient finery but in current fashions like puffy jackets, hoodies and sneakers.

For "Jacob de Graeff," on view on the museum's second floor, Wiley streetcast Brincel Kape'li Wiggins Jr., and modeled the 2018 portrait on the 17th-century Dutch artist Gerard ter Borch's portrait of Jacob de Graeff.

"The person in the original was actually the son of the head of the Dutch East India Trading Company, so it was actually a major company in the 17th century that made a lot of their money on the basis of slave labor. So, there's all kinds of dimensions to the work," museum President and CEO Michael Anderson said.

"Kehinde Wiley is providing one of the most important and interesting interventions in the portrait in the 21st century. It's changing who it is that we see on museum walls."

2. Egyptian mummies at the Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art in Shawnee

The oldest art museum in Oklahoma is a virtual treasure trove, with art ranging from Tang dynasty terra cotta figures and Amazonian shrunken heads to a full suit of armor and two Egyptian mummies, the only ones in Oklahoma.

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Image: Dane Pollei, director and chief curator, left, and Delaynna Trim, curator of collections, at the Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art look at the museum's prized Egyptian mummies Aug. 9, 2019.

The older and better preserved of these ancient mummies, Tutu, is especially beloved, and in 2015, radiologists at St. Anthony Shawnee Hospital performed CT scans to give researchers a look under the mummy's wrappings. As part of its centennial celebration in 2019, the museum worked with a forensic artist to recreate Tutu's face, which is also on view alongside the mummies as well as an array of Egyptian artifacts like mummified animals, canopic jars (which are pretty but – shudders – were made to hold the mummified internal organs of the deceased) and more.

3. "Destination Space" at Science Museum Oklahoma



Image: "Destination Space" is on the second floor of Science Museum Oklahoma.

Oklahoma is the only state that can claim astronaut participation in every phase of NASA's space program, and with the recent landing of the Perseverance rover on Mars, there's still a lot about space that America is exploring.

The museum's second-floor "Destination Space" exhibit offers an introduction to all things space, where visitors can train like the pros in the Mercury Capsule Simulator, learn about the history of the Apollo program and Oklahoma's connections to the lunar landing and see real rocket engines and space artifacts.

4. 92-foot-long Apatosaurus at the Sam Noble Museum in Norman



Image: A towering 92-foot Apatosaurus is a highlight of the Sam Noble Museum at the University of Oklahoma.

The University of Oklahoma's museum of natural history and science boasts 50,000 square feet of exhibit space that traces about 500 million years of Oklahoma's history.

But the highlight is almost certainly the Hall of Ancient Life's "The Clash of the Titans," in which the world's largest Apatosaurus, which is 92 feet long, extends his long neck as he faces a most fearsome Oklahoma predator, the Saurophaganax.

5. "Canyon Princess" at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum

Although James Earle Fraser's "The End of the Trail statue" is better known, master sculptor Gerald Balciar's monumental recreation of a female mountain lion fiercely guards the museum's art galleries.

Balciar created the unforgettable white marble panther sculpture from a single 31-ton block of Colorado yule marble. The finished piece is about twice the size of an actual cougar, towering 15 feet above its base. It weighs slightly more than 8 tons.

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Image: Gerald Balciar's gigantic "Canyon Princess" sculpture guards the entry to the galleries at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum.

In 1995, the sculpture was donated by Balciar as an expression of his appreciation for winning the museum's Prix de West Award for outstanding artistic accomplishment at a critical point early in his career. According to the museum, the making of the "Canyon Princess" took the artist more than a year, with the actual sculpting process lasting five months.

6. Winnie Mae at the Oklahoma History Center

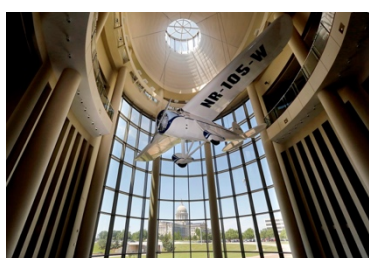


Image: A replica of Oklahoma aviator Wiley Post's plane, the Winnie Mae, is suspended above the atrium of the Oklahoma History Center.

One of the most beloved attractions inside the history center is the life-size replica of iconic Oklahoma aviator Wiley Post's world-famous airplane, the Winnie Mae airplane. In 1931, Post flew the around the world in a record-setting eight days as pilot of the seven-passenger Lockheed Vega.

The Winnie Mae replica is displayed high above the Devon Great Hall, and it can be viewed both from below and from eye level at the museum.

7. Luis Jiménez's "Mustang (Mesteño)" at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art in Norman



Image: Luis Jimenez's "Mustang" sculpture is seen July 13, 2011, outside the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art on the campus of the University of Oklahoma in Norman. The sculpture is now on exhibit in the museum's second-floor galleries.

Colombian artist Fernando Botero massive bronze "Sphinx" sculpture outside the OU art museum is definitely an attention grabber, but inside the museum, it's hard to look away from this gorgeous 8-foot tall fiberglass sculpture of a rearing horse with piercing red eyes.

A gift to the museum from Jerome M. and Wanda Otey Westheimer, "Mustang" now is on view in the second-floor Stuart Wing in the Eugene B. Adkins Gallery.

The 1997 work was created by Jiménez, an American sculptor of Mexican descent best known for his large-scale, brightly colored sculptures steeped in the Mexican-American culture of Texas and New Mexico.

8. Jazz Age Banjo Treasures at the American Banjo Museum



Image: The American Banjo Museum boasts that it houses the largest collection in the world of ornately decorated American-made banjos from the 1920s and '30s.

Even if you're not a fan of the banjo or even music in general, you'll be dazzled by this eye-popping collection of elaborately adorned instruments.

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The Bricktown museum boasts that it houses the largest collection in the world of ornately decorated American-made banjos from the 1920s and '30s.

9. Gallery of Honor at the Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum



Image: Visitors to the Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum browse the Gallery of Honor on April 11, 2014.

Although the outdoor memorial's Field of Empty Chairs and Gates of Time have become iconic, the indoor museum has so many soul-stirring and thought-provoking exhibits to offer. Perhaps the most moving is the museum's Gallery of Honor, which pays individual homage to each of the 168 people killed in the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing.

"It humanizes the event and then also lets people know about each individual that died. So it's not just a number — 168 were killed — it's something that gives them an idea of the personalities of who was killed. They were mothers, brothers, sisters, fathers, and so they get a glimpse into kind of their life and who they were by the objects that are represented in the shadow boxes," said Lynne Porter, the museum's director of educational experience.

"I think sometimes people get so numb to violence around them ... and that's why this place is here: to remember and honor those that were killed."