

The background of the poster is a solid orange color. Overlaid on this is a faint, stylized illustration in a darker shade of orange. The illustration depicts several figures from the Mississippian culture, characterized by their large, flat-topped mounds and intricate facial features. Some figures appear to be wearing headdresses or crowns. The style is reminiscent of ancient petroglyphs or pottery designs.

**ANCIENT MYSTERIES REVEALED**

# SPIRO




**AND THE ART OF THE MISSISSIPPIAN WORLD**

**FEBRUARY 12 – MAY 9, 2021**

**[nationalcowboymuseum.org](http://nationalcowboymuseum.org)**



1700 Northeast 63rd Street  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73111  
(405) 478-2250 • [nationalcowboymuseum.org](http://nationalcowboymuseum.org)

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# The Genesis of *Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World*

This project began in May 2012 at the Mississippian Iconographic Workshop at Texas State University. This workshop revolved around discussions regarding the possibility that a separate “Spirit Lodge” was built within the upper portion of the Craig Mound. It was speculated that this hollow chamber represented a sacred architectural space totally unique in the field of Mississippian research. At this time, I was the assistant curator of anthropology at the University of Tulsa Gilcrease Museum and a workshop participant. In that role, I began contacting and working with other scholars and museum professionals to ascertain the feasibility for a Spiro Mounds exhibition.

It was decided this project would contextualize the Spiro Mounds within the larger Mississippian framework and explore the specific evolution and development of the site—including its unique ceremonial structure. In October 2012, before any significant work was undertaken, I traveled to meet with the Caddo Nation and Wichita and Affiliated Tribes Tribal Councils to ask for their support. There was no need to explain the importance of the site to either Nation, as Spiro is well known and immensely respected by both communities.

In 2013, the Gilcrease Museum invited Caddo and Wichita tribal members as well as curators from the National Museum of the American Indian, National Museum of Natural History, Sam Noble Museum, Oklahoma Historical Society, University of Arkansas, and Spiro Mounds Archaeological Center to Tulsa to begin conversations regarding the viability of the project. During this meeting, the scale and scope of Spiro objects in museum collections across the United States were discussed and evaluated. Participants identified the criteria required for loans and the timeframe needed to properly undertake an exhibition of this magnitude.

During the planning grant period, the team of National Advisors developed and refined the themes of the exhibition, the nature of its accompanying publication, the size of the exhibition, and audience-related educational programming. Over the next year, the Gilcrease Museum worked with the team of advisors via skype and in person to create the exhibition layout, refine the themes, develop an object list, and determine the educational programming.

In the summer and fall of 2014, I inventoried and photographed the University of Tulsa and Gilcrease Museum collections of Spiro and Mississippian material, traveled to the Sam Noble Museum, LeFlore County Historical Society Museum, Oklahoma Historical Society, Woolaroc Museum, and the University of Arkansas to study their holdings of Spiro artifacts, and meet with key members of the Oklahoma Archeological Survey and the Arkansas Archeological Survey at Spiro to understand their ongoing field work at the site. In the fall of 2015, project team members made trips to nearly eleven public and private collections to view more Spiro material. At the conclusion of the highly informative and productive planning grant period, the Gilcrease Museum determined that, based upon plans by the City of Tulsa to expand the museum’s physical size and renovate its building, it could no longer host the exhibition. Therefore, the Spiro Mounds project changed the hosting venue to the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum. This switch was predicated on two factors. First, I had recently changed professional appointments and accepted the post of Curator of Ethnology at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, and second, this move ensured that the project was developed and hosted by an Oklahoma museum with national resources and accessible to tribal members of the Caddo Nation and Wichita and Affiliated Tribes.

Throughout this process, the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum remained in contact with the Caddo and Wichita Nations updating them on the overall progress of the project and inviting community members and elders to the Museum to review its development. We also contracted with the University of Texas to have a graduate student develop the project’s touchscreen map of the United States, highlighting trade routes and other supplementary data.

In 2018 and 2019, all participants were invited once again to the Mississippian Iconographic Workshop at

Texas State University, San Marcos. Together, these assembled humanities scholars discussed the on-going development of the project and numerous other topics such as the value of utilizing private versus museum collections. In the spring and summer of 2019, we finalized all loans and contracted photographers to help photograph objects not made available by specific museums or lenders. On August 1, 2019, we received the chapters from each author for the exhibit publication. We began the editing process and associating all exhibition objects and related images to specific chapters.

This long process of design and implementation will culminate on February 12, 2021 when *Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World* opens at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum.

Eric D. Singleton, PhD  
Curator of Ethnology  
National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum

*Spiro and the Art of the  
Mississippian World*

# **Spiro Mounds Background Information**

**February 12 – May 9, 2021**







Theodore de Bry, *The Broiling of Their Fish over the Flame*, 1591. Colored engraving, after an original painting by Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues in 1564. "Grand Voyages" German Edition. Pt. 2, Pl. 22 "The French in Florida." Collection of Dr. John Rahhal.



Theodore de Bry, *The French Sail up the River in May*, 1591. Colored engraving, after an original painting by Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues in 1564. "Grand Voyages" German Edition. Pt. 1, pl. 19, "A brief and true report of the new found land of Virginia." Collection of Dr. John Rahhal.

## Exploring Spiro Mounds Background Information

**Excerpt from *Recovering Ancient Spiro: Native American Art, Ritual, and Cosmic Renewal* Edited by Eric D. Singleton and F. Kent Reilly III**

### The Mississippian People

Today, we are still attempting to understand the pre-Columbian people Europeans encountered when they arrived—who they were, how they lived, and what they believed. What we do know is that the most advanced of these prehistoric Eastern Woodland cultures are referred to as the Mississippians. The Mississippian people (ad 800–1650) were the largest and most complex society to develop in the eastern half of North America. Living near rivers in the Midwest and Southeast, they created highly developed, agriculturally based communities that were mostly fortified and contained large earthen mounds and broad plazas. These towns and cities were the center of political, social, and ceremonial life in this period. Like many other cultures in the world, the Mississippians had a ranked society, which included commoners, warriors, ritual elite, and chiefs. These chiefs were often considered godlike by their people, sometimes referred to as the Sun. The economic basis for most of the Mississippian centers was the harvesting of flora (plants) and fauna (animals). Corn, or maize, was the dominant crop, but other plants, whether grown or gathered, such as beans, squash, sump weed, acorns, and sunflowers, played an important role. This plant-based diet was supplemented with large and small game, such as bison, deer, and rabbit, as well as fish.

The overall geographic area of the Mississippian world is subdivided into different regions. The Mississippian people moved and traded between towns and regions by walking or using canoes. Uniting these regions was a common ideology, or belief system. Within this belief system was a unity of ideas that were shared among these geographically dispersed centers, namely that of a trilayered universe with an above, middle, and below world. These beliefs dictated all ritual activities and are depicted symbolically on various ceramics, stone statues, pipes, engraved shell gorgets, and copper plates, symbols seen throughout the exhibition and in this publication on nearly every object. Many are still used today by multiple Indigenous artists—allowing people to identify and understand this common ideology.

### Mississippian Art

Each Mississippian center produced its own distinctive art, which in many instances was exchanged with other centers. Thus, the overall geographic area of the Mississippian world was subdivided into stylistic regions. In the worlds of art and archaeology, the term style refers to the formal qualities of a work of art or an artifact (line, shape, proportion,



pattern, etc.). These are the characteristics of an object that allow it to be grouped with similar works. Style analysis of the objects found at Spiro reveals that many objects were imported from different regions across the southeastern United States and probably arrived at the site via a system of interregional exchange.

For example, many of the flint clay pipes and Braden-style engraved shell cups discovered in the Craig Mound at Spiro were probably imported from the Cahokia region of the Central Mississippi Valley. Copper objects, as well as carved shell gorgets and a few ceramic vessels, were most likely brought in from such far-flung areas as the Tennessee River Valley, the region in north Georgia around the Etowah site. Other items correspond to iconographic styles seen in the southern Gulf Coast, likely connecting them to the Moundville region. The motifs and symbols incised on their surfaces link many of these objects together. Currently, most of this symbolic imagery is thought to be connected to prehistoric Native American cosmology, as well as to beliefs in specific gods, supernatural beings, and culture heroes.

Because so many of these objects carry the same symbols and motifs, they clearly represented aspects of a sacred cosmological system in which the inhabitants of the major ceremonial regions and centers participated. Such works are believed to have been imbued with aspects of supernatural power, and many were undoubtedly worn as elite regalia. Thus, style not only indicated points of origin, but also identified the individuals who used these objects as bringers of balance to the natural and supernatural realms inherent in the Mississippian cosmology of ancient Spiro and other principal ceremonial centers.

## Ceremonial Centers

The largest Mississippian ceremonial center known today is Cahokia. Located just outside St. Louis, Missouri, this city, at its height, had a population of ten to twenty thousand people, contained approximately two hundred earthen mounds, and covered five square miles at its height. Founded around ad 1050, this site is divided into five separate phases: Lohmann (ad 1050–1100), Stirling (ad 1000–1200), Moorehead (ad 1200–1275), Sand Prairie (ad 1275–1350), and Oneta (ad 1350–1650). Each phase is identified by distinct ceramic types and style of architecture.<sup>5</sup> The city was palisaded, had a large grand plaza that was the equivalent of thirty-five football fields in size, and contained the third-largest pyramidal mound in all the Americas. “In terms of mass, [the mound] was surpassed only by the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacán and the great pyramid at Cholula, in Mexico.” Known as Monk’s Mound, it measures one hundred feet high and took nearly 150 years to complete. Cahokia was also the likely epicenter of an artistic tradition referred to as Braden. Objects created in this style are found at other large ceremonial centers across the eastern half of North America—including Moundville in Alabama, Etowah in Georgia, and Spiro in Oklahoma. Although the Cahokia site was abandoned in ad 1350, the regional villages and smaller ceremonial centers associated with this site remained, replacing the authoritarian governance model of early Cahokia with a more egalitarian form of government.



Engraved circular palette with intertwined plumed serpents, known as the Issaquena Disk. Issaquena County, Mississippi, AD 1250–1500. Ceramic. Courtesy of the Ohio History Connection. A14/023.

**“In terms of mass, [the mound] was surpassed only by . . . the great pyramid at Cholula, in Mexico.”**

The next leading site was Moundville. Located on the banks of the Black Warrior River thirteen miles south of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, it was established around ad 1000 and rose in prominence to become one of the principal ceremonial centers in the Mississippian world. Comprising nearly thirty mounds, Moundville can be divided into five separate phases, each defined by a distinct ceramic style:

West Jefferson (ad 1020–1120), Moundville I (ad 1120–1260), Moundville II (ad 1260–1400), Moundville III (ad 1400–1520), and Moundville IV (ad 1520–1650). The city center was surrounded by a large defensive wall and sat on nearly 185 acres. The largest mound, Mound A, had a base of two acres and was approximately twenty feet high. On top of each mound sat various public and religious structures as well as the chiefly residence. “Ethnohistorical parallels suggest that Moundville was originally built as a sociogram—an architectural depiction of a social order based on ranked clans. Paired groups of mounds along the plaza’s edge were associated with specific clans, arranged according to social power and prestige.” By ad 1300, however, Moundville had undergone substantial change. The population rapidly diminished, the number of burials increased, and the large defensive walls were demolished. It seems the site had transformed from a large population center to a necropolis—a regional repository for the deceased.

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Engraved shell pendant. Le Flore County, Oklahoma, Spiro site, AD 1200–1450. Marine shell with copper. Minneapolis Institute of Art. 31450a.

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Etowah was another large Mississippian center constructed about the same time as Cahokia and Moundville. It is located in present-day Georgia and sits on the banks of the Etowah River in Bartow County, just south of Cartersville. Containing six mounds, it was the largest known ritual center in the region from ad 1000 to 1550. What is unique about Etowah is that it saw repeated instances of abandonment and repopulation. The first period of abandonment occurred in ad 1200 and lasted for nearly fifty years before Etowah was reconstituted in ad 1250. This period of repopulation is known as the Wilbanks phase (ad 1250–1375). During this time, the site saw the enlargement of previously created mounds as well as many newly constructed ones. The largest of these was Mound C, which “served as the mortuary facility for Etowah’s elite” and included objects and iconographic imagery matching other regional styles—namely Braden, which is largely associated with Cahokia. By ad 1375, archaeological investigations indicate that the region was consumed with warfare and the city sacked. Following this, it was once again abandoned for nearly one hundred years. When it rose once more, it was under the rulership of a new chiefdom. Coincidentally, this new chiefdom was visited by de Soto in August 1540. During this trek, one of his chroniclers mentioned the Etowah site, referring to it as Itaba. “At that time, de Soto made little of Itaba except to say that it was a subject town in the larger, paramount chiefdom of Coosa.” Coosa, as you may recall, controlled a territory of some four hundred miles.

Another of these regional ceremonial centers, and the focus of this publication, is Spiro. Located in Le Flore County, Oklahoma, Spiro is one of America’s most important, but little known, ancient cultural and religious centers. Containing twelve mounds and a population of several thousand, it was physically unremarkable when compared to many other North American Mississippian sites. It is not the largest center ever discovered, nor did it have the biggest population. It also was not palisaded, as were the ceremonial centers of Cahokia, Moundville, and Etowah. What makes Spiro truly unique, however, is that it contained the largest assemblage of engraved, embossed, and carved objects of any presently known Mississippian site. In fact, according to James A. Brown, co-author with Philip Phillips of *Pre-Columbian Shell Engravings from the Craig Mound at Spiro*, Oklahoma, 90 percent of all known engraved shell and ritual artifacts come from this single site, specifically Craig Mound.





Bart Ward and Oliver Meeks, WPA mural of hypothetical Spiroan characters based on objects found at Spiro, 1941. Courtesy of the Wootaroc Museum and Wildlife Preserve.

The quality, quantity, and variety of works found at Spiro are staggering. Thousands of objects, created in various mediums, bear images of people, deities, deity impersonators, familiar animals, and mysterious composite creatures. They also depict events in complex pictorial narratives. Like the other regional centers, Spiro had a distinct artistic style, known as Craig. Although other regional styles, such as those found at or near Moundville, Etowah, and the Tennessee Cumberland area, are found at Spiro, the Craig style appears to be unique to this region and is likely Caddoan in origin. In fact, one specific subgrouping identified as Craig C, is found only at Spiro.

What all these sites appear to have in common, beyond their ideology and general layout, is that they were in a period of decline or abandonment by ad 1400. There are likely many reasons for this; however, recent investigations argue that drought, brought on by the Little Ice Age, may have been the leading cause. If true, drought would have placed undue strain on an agriculture-reliant people. To counter this, the Mississippian elite would have relied on ritual objects, used in ceremonies, which they believed physically affected and shaped the world. Elites, therefore, used these objects both as proof of their ruling status and as vehicles for influencing their environment.

The use of such objects was most clearly evidenced at Spiro. Here, in the heartland of the Caddoan world, a ritualistic attempt was made to restart the dynamics of creation. To facilitate this, a large hollow chamber, or Spirit Lodge, was erected within a nearly thirty-three-foot-high mound. This hollow room—approximately sixteen feet wide and sixteen feet high—was positioned on top of a mound that held the remains and ritual items of more than eight hundred years of Caddoan elite. Within the hollow chamber, ancient Spiroan leaders placed objects of incredible richness and extraordinary quantity, taken from nearly every regional area of the Mississippian world, as well as California and the Valley of Mexico.

Positioned side by side, these objects retold the story of creation. Since the Mississippian people did not have writing, these objects, with their engraved images, functioned as a pictographic writing system, similar to the Bible's Genesis story. The Spiroan creation episode, seen in dances, stories, and rituals, explained the birth of the world. The hope was that this Spirit Lodge, along with the ritual actions of the Spiroan elite, would





Pot hunters digging in the area of the third mound unit of Craig Mound. North view. Le Flore County, Oklahoma, Spiro site. Ca. 1934/1935. Photograph by R. E. Bell. Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, University of Oklahoma.

physically change the world and counter the environmental transformations associated with the Little Ice Age. For the ancient Mississippians, this lodge and the objects held within were their only answer to the changing weather patterns affecting their climate, crops, and culture.

The remarkable objects found at Spiro were produced by the ancestors of Caddo, Wichita, Pawnee, Osage, Lakota, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Muscogee, and countless other Native communities. We know this because of our understanding of

the symbols that were engraved, embossed, or painted on each item. These representations correspond to archaeological and ethnographic records, as well as contemporary Native American folkloric traditions, such as the Hero Twins narrative, the stories and drawings of Thunderbirds, and the saga of Morning Star and Spider Woman. The extraordinary assemblage of objects found at Spiro, therefore, provides critical insight into the cosmology and culture of the ancient Mississippian people and their relationship to today's Native communities from the

American Southeast, Great Plains, Southwest, and possibly Mesoamerica, who used many of the same images in historical hide paintings, ledger drawings, tipi and shield covers, and in twentieth-century artwork, such as paintings, sculpture, ceramics, basketry, and weavings.

### **The Looting of Spiro**

Unfortunately, much of what we understand about the Spiro site comes to us only in bits and pieces. This site remains the location of one of the largest and longest episodes of looting at any



WPA excavation. Le Flore County, Oklahoma, Spiro site. Unknown Photographer. Ca. 1938. Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, University of Oklahoma.

**“Moving swiftly, these men grabbed all the ancient relics they could sell and tossed the textiles, pot sherds, broken shell, and cedar elements onto the ground.”**

American archaeological site in history. First identified in 1914 by Joseph Thoburn, a professor at the University of Oklahoma, the mounds were part of the Choctaw Nation land allotment. Divided into at least four allotment partitions, the Spiro site was dispersed to Choctaw freedmen. At this time, the owners forbid all digging on the property, forcing Thoburn to abandon his attempted excavation. By 1933, however, this restriction was reversed. Needing the money, the owners now leased the land to a group of commercial diggers calling themselves the Pocola Mining Company (PMC). Having no respect for the site or the Caddoan people who created it, they dug with reckless abandon. Their only goal was to extract as much material from the mound as possible. Soon, the PMC discovered the most unique feature ever revealed in North America. They had found the aforementioned hollow chamber,

or Spirit Lodge, in the mound's interior, containing thousands of fresh-water pearls, eight hundred engraved and unengraved marine shell cups, stone and wooden statuary, basketry, feathered textiles, masks, large copper plates, and countless other items. “Moving swiftly, these men grabbed all the ancient relics they could sell and tossed the textiles, pot sherds, broken shell, and cedar elements onto the ground.” As described by Forrest E. Clements, head of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Oklahoma, in 1945, “Sections of cedar poles lay scattered on the ground, fragments of feather and fur textiles littered the whole area; it is impossible to take a single step in hundreds of square yards around the ruined structure without scuffing broken pieces of pottery, sections of engraved shell, and beads of shell, stone, and bone.”

Unfazed by the cultural and

historical crimes they had just committed, the PMC proceeded to sell this looted material to anyone who approached them. Only after scholars noticed an influx of ceremonial items for sale in relic magazines did they attempt to stop the PMC from continuing to plunder the site. Still today, we are not sure what all was taken and where it presently resides. Spread across the world, many, if not most, of these items will likely never be returned.

To save what remained of the site, Oklahoma passed the state's first antiquities laws in 1935. They required all excavations to be licensed through Forrest Clements and the Department of Anthropology at the University of Oklahoma. Denying all other licenses to the site, Clements collaborated with the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to exhume what was left of the mound. From 1936 to 1941, a joint



excavation was undertaken by the University of Oklahoma, the University of Tulsa, the Oklahoma Historical Society, and the Wooten Museum. Even after two years of looting, what was discovered at the Craig Mound still remains the largest assemblage of material ever revealed at a single Mississippian site.

Sadly, the reason for this atrocity of looting had old roots. Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, little effort was made to scientifically assess pre-Columbian architecture and material culture across North America. Forgotten were the sixteenth-century Spanish and French expeditions into the heartland of the Mississippian world. Instead, romanticized versions of a mythical past were presented as fact. The lack of acceptance for a Native American role in the creation of the mounds led to speculation that they were created by European, Mediterranean, or Asian people. In the minds of many Americans, such skilled engineers and artists could only have come from the Old World. It was unfathomable to them that Native Americans could accomplish such feats. Unquestionably, this belief was rooted in racism and a desire to strip Native people of their land, culture, and past. Not until the late 1800s did the US government, once the most enthusiastic proponent of removing and divesting Native people of their land, culture, and heritage, finally acknowledge that Native Americans were the builders of the vast ceremonial centers in the Midwest and Southeast.

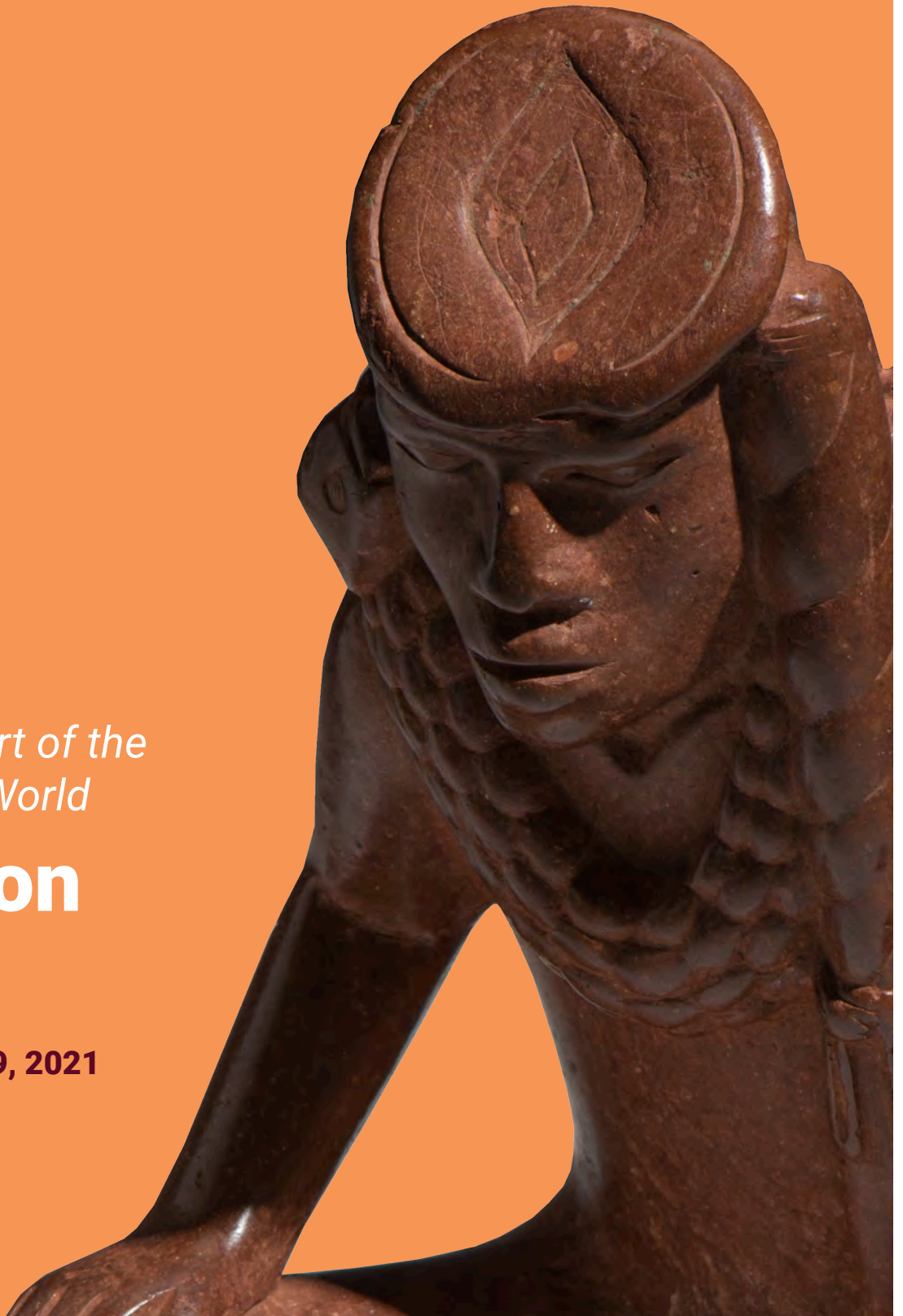
Because of these past biases, this exhibition and accompanying publication are even more relevant. It is critical that we talk about the legacy of Native peoples and connect it to present-day communities in the United States. Showcasing their artistic heritage and highlighting the continuity of cultural traditions also reinforces the United States' greatest strength—its diversity. Highlighting diversity facilitates the introduction of new ideas and perspectives and bridges cultural differences that exist in a nation composed of a multiplicity of people from across the globe. Moreover, by presenting both Native American and scholarly views about the Mississippian world, we are able to connect contemporary Native American communities with their ancestral past, and help non-Native people understand the ancient cultures who once occupied lands in the country's Midwest and Southeast.

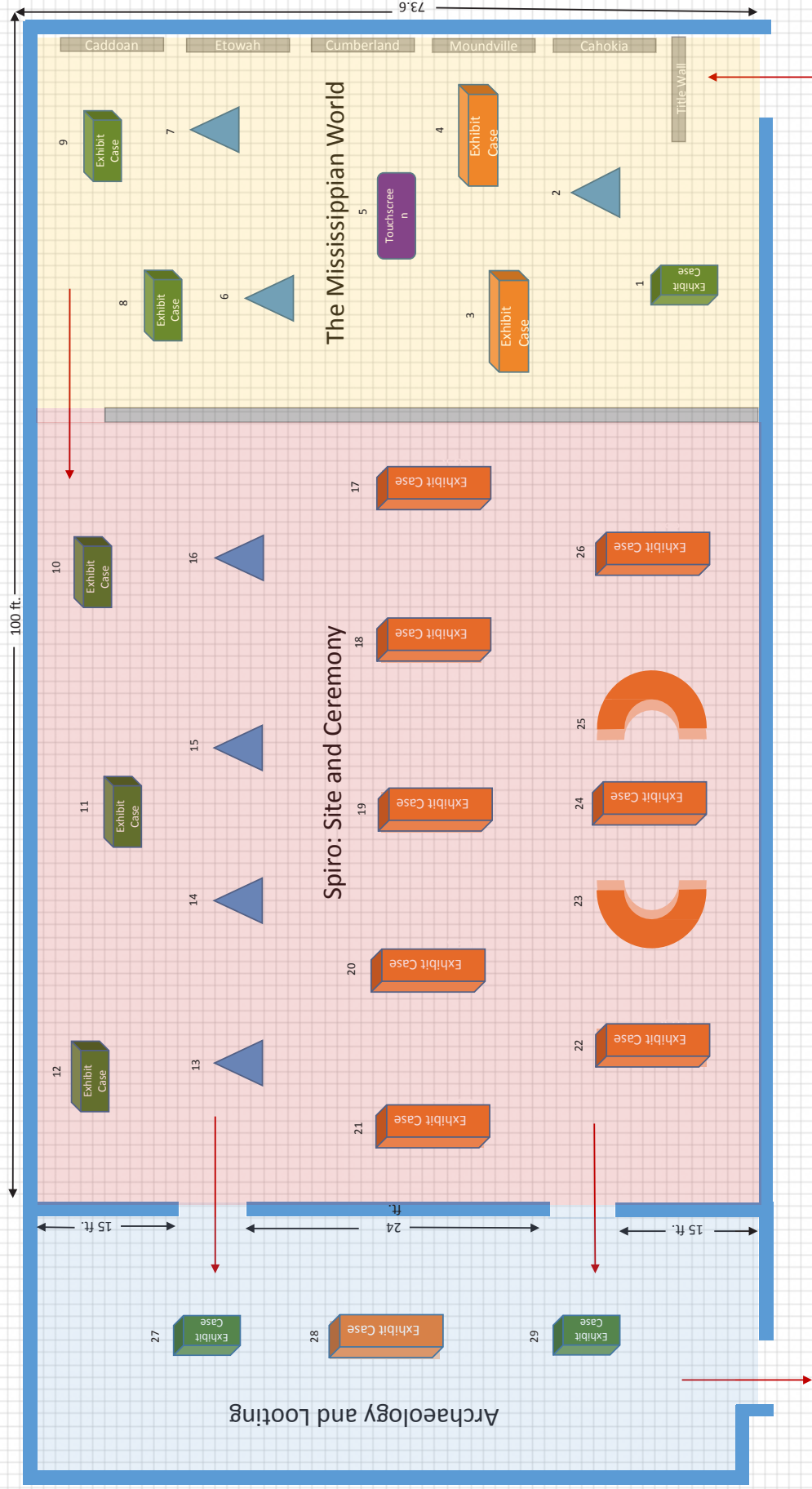


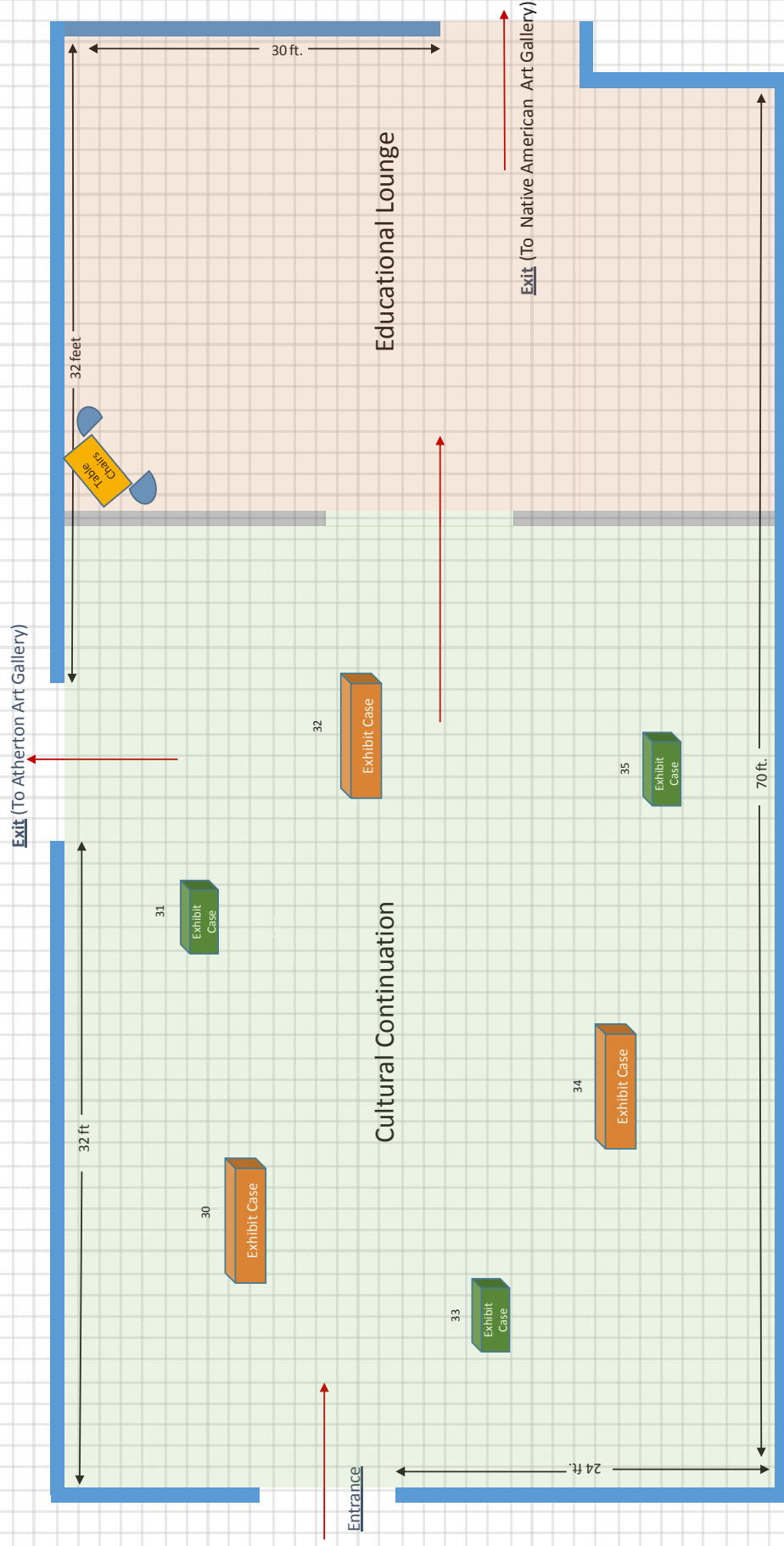
*Spiro and the Art of the  
Mississippian World*

# **Exhibition Layout**

**February 12 – May 9, 2021**



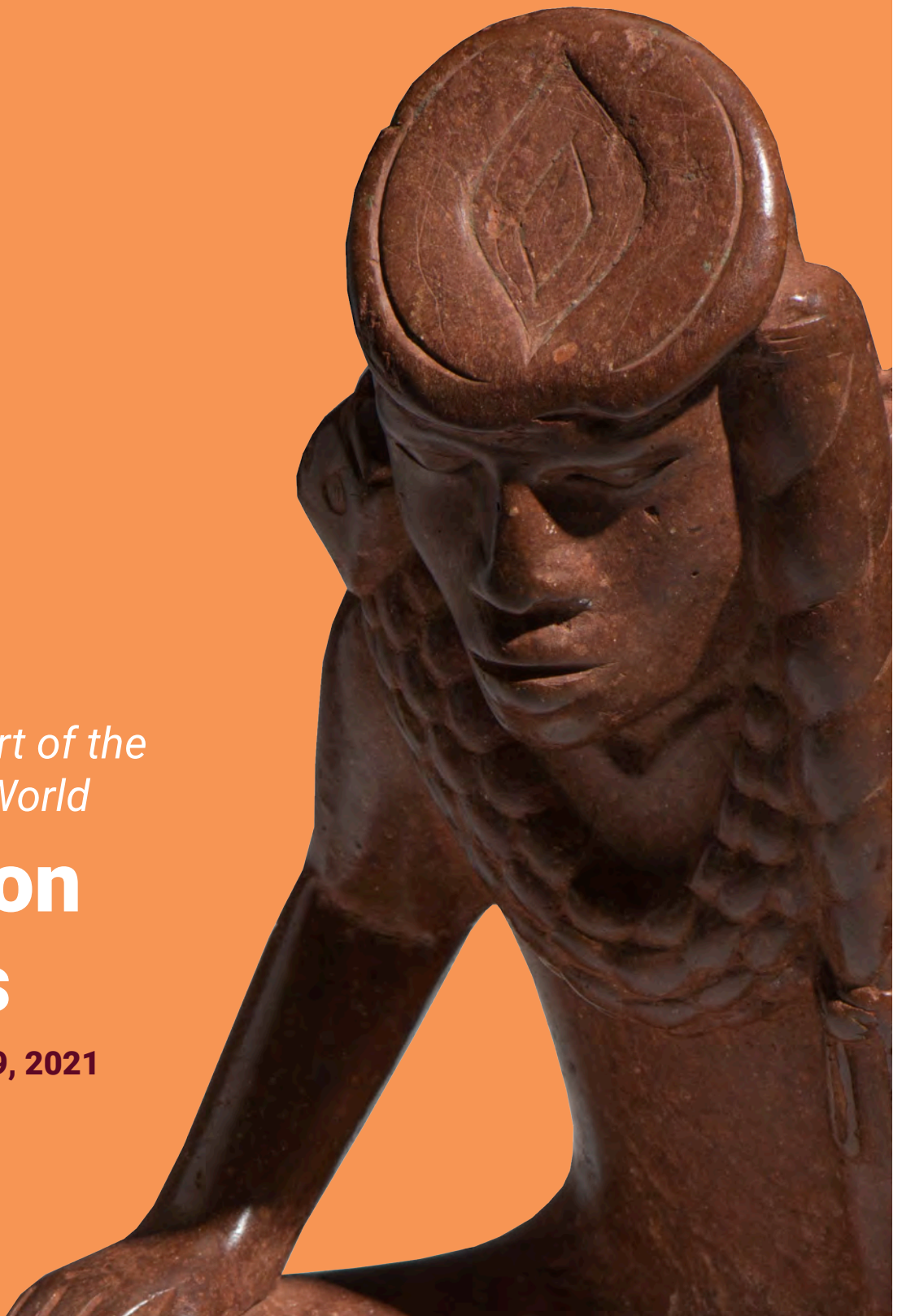




*Spiro and the Art of the  
Mississippian World*

# **Exhibition Themes**

**February 12 – May 9, 2021**





# The Mississippian World

## Theme I: Who are the Mississippian People?

The Mississippian people (900 - 1650), according to co-curator F. Kent Reilly III, were a series of stable and prosperous cultures that developed in the river regions of the Midwest and Southeast. They built large, stockaded towns with monumental earthen mounds and broad plazas. These towns were the focus of Native American political, social, and ceremonial life during this period. Political life was based on ranked societies headed by chiefs who were associated with divine attributes by their people. These chiefs and their immediate relatives controlled political power. The economic basis for most Mississippian centers was both flood-plain agriculture and the harvesting of local flora and fauna. Corn (or maize) was often a dominant crop but other plants, whether grown or gathered such as beans, squash, sump weed, acorns and sunflowers, played an important role. This plant-based diet was supplemented by hunting and fishing. Each Mississippian center produced its own distinctive art, which in some instances was exchanged with other centers whose residents had created their own characteristic styles. Thus, the overall geographic area of the Mississippian world was sub-divided into stylistic regions. Despite these stylistic divisions, there existed a unity of themes that was shared by geographically dispersed centers because of similar religious beliefs, ritual activities, mythic narratives and cosmology, which often relied upon common artistic expressions of specific symbols.

## Spiro: Site and Ceremony

### Theme II: What made the Spiro Mounds so unique—in both the history of North America and the larger Mississippian world?

In many ways, Spiro Mounds is physically unremarkable when compared to other North American and Mississippian sites. It is not the largest Mississippian center ever discovered, nor did it have the biggest population. What made it unique was that it contained the largest assemblage of engraved, embossed, and carved objects of any known Mississippian site. In fact, according to James A. Brown, author of *Pre-Columbian Shell Engravings from the Craig Mound at Spiro, Oklahoma*, ninety percent of all known engraved shell and ritual artifacts come from this single site (Galloway, 1989). This matchless assemblage has mystified scholars since the 1930s, when the site's discovery led many to speculate that its origins lay in Central Mexico or with a mythical lost civilization. Today, we know that both of these ideas are false. The production and remarkable craftsmanship of the objects were realized by the ancestors of today's Caddo, Wichita, Pawnee, Osage, Lakota, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Muscogee, and countless other Native communities as demonstrated by archaeological and ethnographic records.

### Theme III: Why did the Spiroan and Mississippian peoples bring and bury their most sacred ceremonial and religious goods at Spiro?

Recent archaeological and iconographic analyses confirm that while objects came to Spiro at various stages in the site's development, the vast majority of imported objects appears to have been brought there around 1400. This date corresponds to the construction of an architectural hollow chamber or "Spirit Lodge" that was built inside an earthen structure known as Craig Mound. It is possible, according to archaeologist George Sabo III, that the Spirit Lodge may have been constructed in response to the effects of climate change brought on by a "Little Ice Age." The chamber became the ritualistic vessel that Spiroan spiritual leaders built in order to store their world's most sacred objects—including flint-clay statues and effigy pipes, engraved shell cups, sacred regalia, repoussé copper plates, ornamented fabrics, double-weave baskets, and other pieces from distant regions. For example, there were baskets in the hollow chamber that contained shell beads from the Sea of Cortez and a large piece of obsidian from the Valley of Mexico. Similar to the historic Ghost Dance movement

of the late 19th century, and other spiritual revitalization efforts, it is believed that by creating the Spirit Lodge the ceremonial leaders at Spiro were attempting to ritualistically restart time and reverse the effects of climate change. This possible scenario is what makes the ceremonial site of Spiro so distinctive from other Mississippian centers.

## **Discovery of Spiro: Archaeology and Looting**

### **Theme IV: What was the impact of Looting and Archaeology?**

Both looting and New Deal/Works Progress Administration (WPA) archaeological excavations came together in a near-perfect storm at Spiro. In 1935, the public's imagination was peaked when the Kansas City Star called the site's discovery a "King Tut's Tomb in the Arkansas Valley," and identified it as the greatest source of Mississippian iconographic material ever found. First identified in 1914 by Joseph Thoburn, the site was owned by Choctaw and Chickasaw Freedmen who initially prohibited digging on the land. By 1933, that prohibition had changed. The families, perhaps feeling the effects of the Great Depression, relented to the repeated requests to excavate their property, and leased part of the site to a group of commercial diggers calling themselves the Pocola Mining Company. Complicating the situation was the manner in which it was first excavated. Not concerned with historic preservation, the mining company dug with reckless abandon—applying no methodology or record keeping. The goal was simple: extract the material inside. To accomplish this, the workers tunneled horizontally and soon discovered a hollow chamber, now described as a "Spirit Lodge" by scholars that contained thousands of painted, engraved, and embossed objects laid out in a ritualistic manner similar to an historic Arikara temple (Gilmore, 1930). Moving swiftly, the workers grabbed all the ancient relics they could sell and tossed the textiles, pot sherds, broken shell, and cedar elements onto the ground. As described by Forest E. Clements, head of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Oklahoma:

Sections of cedar poles lay scattered on the ground, fragments of feather and fur textiles littered the whole area; it is impossible to take a single step in hundreds of square yards around the ruined structure without scuffing broken pieces of pottery, sections of engraved shell, and beads of shell, stone, and bone (Clements, 1945).

What the looters considered valuable was sold on-site out of the trunks of cars, and through relic magazines. Quickly, this material was dispersed into private hands across the world and the loss was incalculable. This singular site, which held the keys to understanding Mississippian iconography, religion, ceremony, and countless other social, political, and trade practices, will now always remain a partial mystery as there is no way to reassemble all the items that were sold or to place them in their correct context within the mound. Owing to the renewed interest in archaeology brought about by the New Deal, the state of Oklahoma stopped the commercial digging at the Spiro site. In November of 1935, the state passed legislation requiring a license for all excavations in the state, and placed control of the site in the hands of semi-experienced archaeologists at the University of Oklahoma. Employees of the Pocola Mining Company, angered that they were denied a lease to dig, dynamited the mound, and no amount of legislation could repair the destruction. The looters were now gone and only devastation remained. WPA-sponsored excavations began in 1936 and continued until 1941, subsidized by the wealthy philanthropist Frank Philips and academic institutions—specifically the University of Oklahoma, University of Tulsa, and the Oklahoma Historical Society—in order to uncover what little remained of the mound's contents.



# Cultural Continuation

## Theme IV: Why is it important to understand and acknowledge the cultural legacy of Native Americans?

Between the 16th and 19th centuries, little effort was made to scientifically assess pre-Columbian architecture and material culture across North America. Instead, romanticized versions of a mythical past were presented as fact. The lack of acceptance of a Native American role in the creation of the mounds led to speculation that they were created by European, Mediterranean, or Asian people. In the minds of many Americans, such skilled engineers and artists could only have come from the “Old World,” and it was unfathomable to them that Native Americans could accomplish such feats. Unquestionably, this belief was rooted in racism and a desire to strip Native people of their land, culture, and past (Brose, 5). It was not until the late 1800s that the United States government, once the most enthusiastic proponent of removing and divesting Native people of their land, culture and heritage, finally acknowledged that they were the builders of the vast ceremonial centers in the Midwest and Southeast. Because of these past biases, it is even more critical that we talk about the legacy of Native peoples and connect it to present day communities in the United States. Showcasing their artistic heritage and highlighting the continuity of cultural traditions also reinforces the United States’ greatest strength—its diversity. Highlighting diversity facilitates the introduction of new ideas and perspectives and bridges cultural differences that exist in a nation composed of a multiplicity of people from across the globe. Moreover, by presenting both Native American and scholarly views about the Mississippian world, this project connects contemporary Native American communities with their ancestral past, and helps non-Native visitors understand the ancient peoples who once occupied lands in the country’s Midwest and Southeast.

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*Spiro and the Art of the  
Mississippian World*

# **Text Panels & Illustrated Object Labels**

**February 12 – May 9, 2021**



# The Mississippian World

## The Mississippian People

The Mississippian people (AD 800–1650) were the largest and most complex society to develop in the eastern half of North America. Living near rivers in the Midwest and Southeast, they created highly developed, agriculturally based communities that were mostly fortified and contained large earthen mounds and broad plazas.

These towns and cities were the center of political, social, and ceremonial life in this period. Like many other cultures in the world, the Mississippians had a ranked society, which included commoners, warriors, ritual elite, and chiefs. These chiefs were often considered godlike by their people, sometimes referred to as the Sun.

The economic basis for most of the Mississippian centers was the harvesting of flora (plants) and fauna (animals). Corn, or maize, was the dominant crop, but other plants, whether grown or gathered, such as beans, squash, sump weed, acorns, and sunflowers, played an important role. This plant-based diet was supplemented with large and small game, such as bison, deer, and rabbit, as well as fish.

Uniting the Mississippian world was a common ideology, or belief system. Within this belief system was a unity of ideas that were shared among geographically dispersed centers. The most prominent belief was namely that of a trilayered universe with an above, middle, and below world and linked by a central axis known as the axis mundi. These beliefs dictated all ritual activities and are depicted symbolically on various ceramics, stone statues, pipes, engraved shell gorgets, and copper plates, symbols seen throughout the exhibition on nearly every object. Many are still used today by multiple Indigenous artists—allowing people to identify and understand this common ideology.

## Cahokia (Illinois)

The largest Mississippian ceremonial center known today is Cahokia. Located just outside St. Louis, Missouri, this city had a population of 10,000 to 20,000 thousand people, contained nearly 200 earthen mounds, and covered five square miles.

Founded around AD 1050, this site is divided into five separate phases: Lohmann (AD 1050–1100), Stirling (AD 1000–1200), Moorehead (AD 1200–1275), Sand Prairie (AD 1275–1350), and Oneta (AD 1350–1650). Each phase is identified by distinct ceramic types and style of architecture.

The city was palisaded and had a large grand plaza that was the equivalent of thirty-five football fields. It also contained the third-largest pyramidal mound in all the Americas. Known as Monk's Mound, it measures one hundred feet high and took nearly 150 years to complete. The Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacán and the great pyramid at Cholula, both located in Mexico, are the only pyramids larger than Monk's Mound.

Cahokia was also the likely epicenter of an artistic tradition referred to as Braden. Objects created in this style are found at other large ceremonial centers across the eastern half of North America—including Moundville in Alabama, Etowah in Georgia, and Spiro in Oklahoma.

## Etowah (Georgia)

Etowah was a large Mississippian center constructed about the same time as Cahokia and Moundville. It is in present-day Georgia and sits on the banks of the Etowah River in Bartow County, just south of Cartersville. Containing six mounds, it was the largest known ritual center in the region from AD 1000 to –1550.

What is unique about Etowah is that it saw repeated instances of abandonment and repopulation. The first period of abandonment occurred in AD 1200 AD and lasted for nearly fifty years. It was rebuilt in AD 1250. This period of repopulation is known as the Wilbanks phase (AD 1250–1375). During this time, the site saw the enlargement of previously created mounds as well as many newly constructed ones. The largest of these was

Mound C. It served as the mortuary facility for Etowah's elite and included objects and iconographic imagery matching other regional styles—namely Braden.

By AD 1375, archaeological investigations indicate that the region was consumed with warfare and the city sacked. Following this, it was once again abandoned for nearly 100 years. When it rose once more, it was under the rulership of a new chiefdom. This new chiefdom was visited by Hernando de Soto in August 1540. During this trek, one of his chroniclers mentioned the Etowah site—referring to it as Itaba.

## **Moundville (Alabama)**

Located on the banks of the Black Warrior River thirteen miles south of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, Moundville was established around AD 1000 and rose in prominence to become one of the principal ceremonial centers in the Mississippian world.

Comprising nearly thirty mounds, Moundville can be divided into five separate phases, each defined by a distinct ceramic style: West Jefferson (AD 1020–1120), Moundville I (AD 1120–1260), Moundville II (AD 1260–1400), Moundville III (AD 1400–1520), and Moundville IV (AD 1520–1650).

The city center was surrounded by a large defensive wall and sat on nearly 185 acres. The largest mound, Mound A, had a base of two acres and was approximately twenty feet high. On top of each mound sat various public and religious structures as well as the chiefly residence. Ethnohistorical parallels suggest that Moundville was originally built as a sociogram—an architectural depiction of a social order based on ranked clans. Paired groups of mounds along the plaza's edge were associated with specific clans, arranged according to social power and prestige.

By AD 1300, however, Moundville had undergone substantial change. The population rapidly diminished, the number of burials increased, and the large defensive walls were demolished. It appears the site had transformed from a large population center to a necropolis—a regional repository for the deceased.

## **Kincaid (North of the Cumberland Valley)**

The area known as the Cumberland has one of the densest concentrations of mound sites from the Mississippian Period. The most notable mound site in this area is called Kincaid. Located in Brookport, Illinois, this site contained 19 mounds and was occupied between AD 1000 – 1400. Like the other eastern mounds, it was palisaded. It is believed that this site was the seat of regional politics during this period as it maintained a close trading relationship with Cahokia and the other mound sites in the Cumberland Valley.

Evidence indicates that the most common source of food was deer, bear, elk, turkey, and the eastern box turtle. Corn (maize) was the most harvested plant, but others, such as sunflowers, squash, beans, hickory nuts, and acorns were also utilized. This region had easy access to salt and mineral springs, which made it a powerful trade zone.

Just like Cahokia, Etowah, Moundville, and Spiro, by 1450 the site had been abandoned and replaced by scattered fortified villages. The fact that so many cities and towns were being abandoned gives rise to the conclusion that a common event was impacting every population group. This event was likely environmental and brought on by what is known today as a Little Ice Age. This Little Ice Age would have change weather patterns—effecting temperature, rain, and animal populations.

## **Spiro (Oklahoma)**

Located in Le Flore County, Oklahoma, Spiro is one of America's most important, but little known, ancient cultural and religious centers. Containing twelve mounds and a population of several thousand, it is physically un-

remarkable when compared to many other North American Mississippian sites. It is not the largest center ever discovered, nor did it have the biggest population. It also was not palisaded, as were the ceremonial centers of Cahokia, Moundville, and Etowah. What made it unique were the thousands of ceremonial objects found in an earthen Hollow Chamber—something not seen anywhere else in North America.

It was divided into different occupation phases beginning with the Evans Phase (AD 950 – 1100), Harlan phase (AD 1100 – 1250), Norman Phase (AD 1250 – 1350), and concluding with the Spiro Phase (AD 1350 – 1450).

The people of Spiro relied on a wide variety of animals for meat, including deer, elk, turkey, fish, turtles, geese, ducks, squirrels, opossums, raccoons, and other small mammals. The Spiro people also did not rely on maize as their primary cultivated crop like the inhabitants of the other ceremonial centers. Instead, they harvested chenopod (quinoa), maygrass, barley, and knotweed. This was supplemented with nuts and other wild plants.

After AD 1450, the site and region underwent considerable changes, both culturally and environmentally. Artifacts found during this period reflect a major shift and resemble those typical of groups living on the Plains, such as the Wichita. These differences in food cultivation and mound construction often leave scholars defining this region, and site, as Caddoan and not specifically Mississippian. However, it is unquestionable that Spiro shared the same iconography and belief system as the other Mississippian Ceremonial Centers.

## **A Native American Navy**

The oldest canoes identified in North America date back 6,000 years. Known as dugouts, these were made by burning a log with a controlled fire, then scraping and chopping out the wood with a variety of tools. These tools included shell and stone adzes, and wooden scrapers. Dugouts were used for local and long distant trading as well as for fishing, hunting, gathering expeditions, and warfare. According to the Pennsylvania Heritage Project, “evidence indicates that in the winter Native Americans may have filled their canoes with rocks and sunk them below the freeze line to escape being crushed by ice and to keep them from being damaged by repeated freezing and thawing.”

In the sixteenth-century, Spanish conquistador Hernando de Soto (1500–1542) encountered huge dugout canoes, some measuring nearly one hundred feet in length, on the Mississippi River. Each carried between seventy-five and eighty warriors, with twenty-five paddlers on each side. Carved from a single log, these dugouts were heavy, but proved to be swift and navigable. During one encounter, it was reported that a fleet of canoes, with a leader resting under a canopy in the rear, advanced upon the de Soto expedition. When attacking, they broke off into various coordinated groups, surrounding the Spanish.

In 1643, Roger Williams (1603 - 1683), a puritan minister, commented on the types of canoes he saw near Plymouth, Massachusetts. These were used on the ocean and had poles erected in the center of the dugout with an attached sail. He described large naval battles between opposing fleets of canoes. Engraved on shell found at Spiro were images of canoes and ships with what appear to be sails. This indicates that sailing and naval power has a long history in North America—predating Europeans by hundreds, if not thousands, of years.

## **Native American Art**

For thousands of years, Indigenous people in North America have carved and drawn on rock, carved stone, embossed copper, incised shell, painted ceramics, woven baskets and mantles, tattooed skin, and quilled and beaded leather. Unlike many European art objects, Indigenous art was not passive. It was created with a specific purpose or scene that gave it power—power to physically act upon the world or impart knowledge to others via a folkloric or personal narrative.

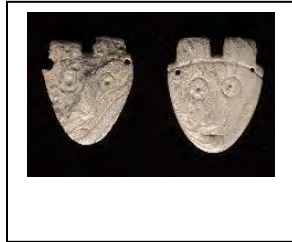
The scenes held a cultural value that was critical to understanding the physical world in which humans resided.

Many motifs held a religious interpretation only understood by a select few individuals who were aware of their secret meaning. Other symbols and narratives were understood publicly.

Regardless, we are looking at iconographic art forms that have largely remained intact for millennia and can be traced from the earliest rock art to the early 20th century paintings of the Great Plains and Southwest, and contemporary artwork from the American Southeast. The images you see on objects in this exhibition show this cultural and artistic continuity.



## The Mississippian World Object Labels



### HUMAN HEAD EAR ORNAMENTS

Mississippian

St. Clair County Illinois, Booker T. Washington Site

AD 1100 – 1250

Marine shell

Gilcrease Museum, 90.227 & 90.228

These ear ornaments are seen throughout the gallery in the ears of human figures. One pair is in ears of the “Big Boy” or Morning Star pipe and the other is seen in the ears of a human face embossed in copper. Known as Short-Nosed-God maskettes, they likely signify the wearer as *Morning Star*, the god of war and husband of *Evening Star*. He is also known as *Redhorn* and *He-Who-Wears-Human-Heads-In-His-Ears*.

The ear ornaments themselves likely represent the *Hero Twins* and the wearer has having the power associated with each twin—specifically Thunder and Lightning, which they are sometimes called in Native American folklore.



### ENGRAVED SHELL GORGET WITH CROSS AND CIRCLE MOTIF

Mississippian period

Kentucky

AD 1300 – 1450

Marine shell

Gilcrease Museum, 90.454

In the tri-layered belief system found in North and Central America, the cross is the symbol that corresponds to the real-world. For the Muscogee people, it is the four-log fire. For others, it represents the cardinal directions and/or the four winds. On this gorget, it is surrounded by a circle, which denotes a dance circle.



### INCISED SHELL GORGET

Mississippian/Caddoan

Arkansas

AD 1650

Marine shell

Gilcrease Museum, 90.804

This gorget shows the early connection and cultural transference between Indigenous people and Europeans in the Arkansas region. Fashioned in the European style, this gorget is incised with Caddoan designs.



**ENGRAVED SHELL GORGET WITH PLEIADES MOTIF – TRISKELE STYLE**

Mississippian period  
Tennessee  
AD 1300 – 1450  
Marine shell  
Gilcrease Museum, 90.453

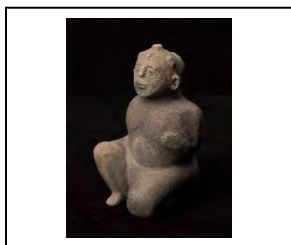
This gorget shows a map of the universe or cosmic realm. The swirl pattern in the center represents a whirlpool, entrance to the below world. The circle around the swirl represents a dance circle, and the real world. The six punctuated circles with dots between them is the constellation Pleiades and stars in the night sky. The circles around the outer edge represent the tuffs, or under feathers, of Birdman, and the above world.



**RAPTOR WITH HUMAN HEAD EFFIGY PIPE**

Mississippian period  
Issaquena County, Mississippi  
AD 1200 – 1400  
Limestone  
Gilcrease Museum, 61.1206

This pipe was made of limestone and has been tracked to a specific quarry site on the Mississippi River near Vicksburg, Mississippi. The outcropping is next to a whirlpool, which is the entrance to the below world. In the Mississippian belief system, material, design and the location of creation all played a role in the power an object held.



**HUMAN EFFIGY BOTTLE – BELL PLAIN STYLE**

Mississippian period  
Mississippi County, Missouri  
AD 1200 – 1600  
Ceramic  
Gilcrease Museum, 54.1317



### LONG-NOSE MAKSETTES EAR ORNAMENTS

Mississippian period  
 Illinois, Meppen Site  
 AD 1000 – 1400  
 Copper  
 Charles L. Adam Family Collection

Ear ornaments made of gleaming white whelk shell or polished copper, with prominent noses, represent the *Hero Twins* and their great powers, are an essential part of the balance of nature. They could either give life, for they are the rainstorms of spring that cause the prairies to bloom, or they can kill, with the destructive force of lightning accompanied by thunder.



### ENGRAVED CIRCULAR PALETTE WITH INTERTWINED PLUMED SERPENTS

Mississippian period  
 Issaquena County, Mississippi  
 AD 1250 – 1500  
 Stone  
 Ohio History Connection, A14/023

Palettes had many functions. They were portable alters where medicines and other powerful mixtures were created. Based on the symbols engraved on them, they also were portals, allowing preternatural powers from the beneath world to access this realm.



### ENGRAVED CIRCULAR PALETTE WITH HAND-AND-EYE MOTIF AND INTERTWINED SERPENTS

Mississippian period  
 Hale County, Alabama, Moundville Site  
 AD 1300 – 1450  
 Stone  
 Alabama Museum of Natural History, M1922

Known as the “Rattlesnake Disc,” this palette was found by a farmer plowing his land near Moundville, Alabama, in the mid-1800s and given to archaeologist E.A. Smith in 1883. It was transferred to the University of Alabama Museum in 1905.

The iconography associated with this disc is associated with the night sky. In the Mississippian belief system, the below world moves into the sky with the setting of the sun—essentially trading places with the daytime sky. The entwined rattle snakes form a portal through which the hand and eye motif (the constellation Orion) can move from the beneath world into the night sky.



#### HUMAN HEAD EFFIGY VESSEL WITH FACIAL TATTOOS

Mississippian period  
Crittenden County, Arkansas, Matlock Site  
AD 1350 – 1550  
Ceramic  
University of Arkansas, 31-35-3

There is a great deal of speculation about human head effigy pots. No two are alike and many, if not most, are covered in body paint or tattoos. It is likely that they represent real people and may have been used in adoption ceremonies and connected to the long and short-nose maskettes of the *Hero Twins*.

According to Mark Simms, a prominent Osage elder, during the adoption ceremony, the nose was cut across the bridge to release the foreign blood of the adopted one. Of all the known head pots, 13.1% have incised cut marks across the nose.



#### HUMAN HEAD EFFIGY VESSEL WITH FACIAL TATTOOS

Mississippian period  
Crittenden County, Arkansas, Matlock Site  
AD 1350 – 1550  
Ceramic  
University of Arkansas, 31-35-3



#### HALEY COMPLICATED INCISED JAR

Mississippian period  
Caddoan  
AD 800 – 1200  
Ceramic  
Gift of Quintus Herron, Museum of the Red River, 13.10.86



#### ENGRAVEFD BOTTLE WITH WINGED SERPENT – HEMPHILL STYLE

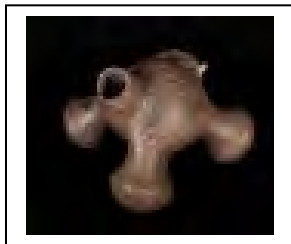
Mississippian period  
Hale County, Alabama, Moundville Site  
AD 1300 – 1450  
Ceramic  
Alabama Museum of Natural History, 1932.3.5

The winged serpent is likely a variant of the underwater panther. The differences in description is due to location and a combination of fossil remains and local geography. This manifestation is more common in the southern and southeastern portions of North America. The panther is found in the north and northeastern Great Lakes region. In the Southwest it is described as a serpent.



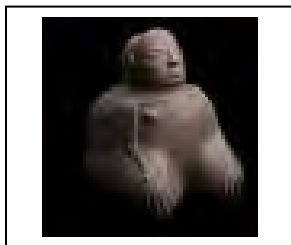
#### ENGRAVED DOUBLE BOTTLE – HUDSEN ENGRAVED STYLE

Mississippian period  
Yale County, Arkansas  
AD 1500 – 1700  
Ceramic  
Gilcrease Museum, 54.1523



#### TURTLE EFFIGY VESSEL

Mississippian period  
Arkansas  
AD 1550 – 1750  
Ceramic  
Gilcrease Museum, 54.1651



#### HUMAN EFFIGY VESSEL – BELL PLAIN STYLE

Mississippian period  
Dunkin county, Missouri  
AD 1400 – 1600  
Ceramic  
Gilcrease Museum, 54.1516

Beginning in the AD 1300s, female effigy bottles grew in importance. The exact deity being referenced is unknown, but she is likely a figure known as *The-Old-Woman-Who-Never-Dies* in the Mandan tradition and referred to as *Earthmother* in others. In this capacity, she is tied to the earth and the life and death of the world due to her association with corn and crops. In the winter she is responsible for the destruction of harvests, but in the spring is responsible for their renewed growth. She is therefore also associated with the concept of rebirth in Native American culture.



#### SCALLOPED-RIM VESSEL

Mississippian period  
Upshur County, Texas  
AD 1200 – 1400  
Ceramic  
Gift of Don Herron, 08.23.1

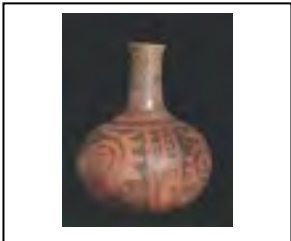


#### **CUP WITH INCISED LONG BONE AND SKULL MOTIF**

Mississippian period  
Hale County, Alabama, Moundville Site  
AD 1300 – 1450  
Ceramic  
Alabama Museum of Natural History, 08.23.1

#### **INCISED VESSEL WITH HANDS MOTIF**

Mississippian period  
Hale County, Alabama, Moundville Site  
AD 1300 – 1450  
Ceramic  
Alabama Museum of Natural History



#### **NEGATIVE PAINTED BOTTLE**

Mississippian period  
Scott County, Arkansas  
AD 1300 - 1500  
Ceramic  
Gilcrease Museum, 54.269

Motifs on bottles are important indicators of the use a item played in society. Often these bottles were used to make medicine or other mixtures that could cause hallucinations and feelings of euphoria.

The swirl pattern on this bottle is a moth proboscis (elongated nose) and is likely from the giant hawk moth. Hawk moth proboscises can extend up to 14 inches. Analysis of many similar vessels and cups from the Mississippian period indicate that liquid containing *Datura* was stored inside. *Datura* is a hallucinogenic plant which the hawk moth feeds on in North America.



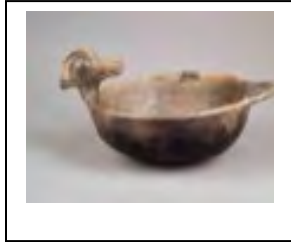
#### **ANIMAL EFFIGY BOTTLE OF UNDERWATER PANTHER**

Mississippian period  
Arkansas (Quapaw)  
AD 1550 - 1750  
Ceramic  
Gilcrease Museum, 54.2634

This vessel depicts the underwater panther. Depending on the region and tribe, the underwater panther could be described as a underwater serpent, underwater monster, or a combination of all three depending on the tribe. In some cases it had wings and antlers. The underwater panther resides in the beneath world and is tied to the making of medicine and secret society knowledge. It is also opposed to *Birdman* and other entities that inhabit the day sky and above world.



It is likely that the concept for this and other creatures comes from dinosaur fossils. The discovery of dinosaur fossils by ancient people across the world helps explain the near universal acceptance of giants, dragons, and other mythical creatures.



**BIRD EFFIGY BOWL**

Mississippian period  
Collinsville, Illinois  
AD 1050 - 1250  
Ceramic  
Gilcrease Museum, 54.6527



**HUMAN LEG VESSEL WITH MODERN REPAIR TO FOOT**

Mississippian period  
St. Francis County, Arkansas  
AD 1550 - 1650  
Ceramic  
Gilcrease Museum, 54.346



**ENGRAVED AND INCISED BOWL – HODGES ENGRAVED STYLE**

Mississippian period  
Conway, Arkansas  
AD 1200 - 1700  
Ceramic  
Gilcrease Museum, 54.446



**KNEELING FIGURE EFFIGY PIPE**

Mississippian period  
Tennessee/Georgia  
AD 1400 – 1500  
Stone  
Frank Sherman Benson Fund and the Henry L. Batterman Fund  
Brooklyn Museum, 37.2802PA



**HUMAN FACE EFFIGY MASK**

Mississippian period  
Tennessee/Georgia  
AD 1400 – 1500  
Marine Shell  
Brooklyn Museum, 60.23.2



#### **FEMALE EFFIGY PIPE**

Mississippian period

Illinois

AD 1050 - 1200

Flint Clay

Gilcrease Museum, 61.499

This pipe likely represents *Earthmother*. The imagery of gourds and plants covering her body is characteristic of this divine figure.



#### **ENGRAVED GORGET WITH SPIDER AND COSMIC MOTIF**

Mississippian period

Likely Tennessee

AD 1350 - 1450

Marine Shell

Collection of Dr. John Rahhal

This gorget represents a cosmic map. The incised designs show the above, middle, and below realms. It also shows the night sky and the constellation Pleiades. Known as the seven sisters or seven children, the Pleiades is the constellation a deceased individual must pass through in order to be reborn. The spider at the center of the gorget is tied to the mythic stories of spider and her role in the creation of the earth.



#### ***THE FRENCH LEFT IN CHARLESFORT SUFFER FROM A SCARCITY OF PROVISIONS*, by Theodore de Bry (1591)**

Colored engraving after original painting by Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues in 1564

*The French in Florida*, Part 1 of *Grand Voyages* (German Edition) pl. 7

Collection of Dr. John Rahhal



#### ***THE BOILING OF THEIR FISH OVER THE FLAME*, by Theodore de Bry (1591)**

Colored engraving after original painting by Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues in 1564

*The French in Florida*, Part 2 of *Grand Voyages* (German Edition) pl. 14

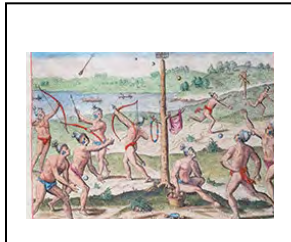
Collection of Dr. John Rahhal



**THE SOLEMN CONSECRATIONN OF THE SKIN OF A STAG TO THE SUN, by Theodore de Bry (1591)**

Colored engraving after original painting by Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues in 1564

*The French in Florida, Part 1 of Grand Voyages (German Edition) pl. 35*  
Collection of Dr. John Rahhal



**EXERCISE OF THE YOUTHS, by Theodore de Bry (1591)**

Colored engraving after original painting by Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues in 1564

*The French in Florida, Part 1 of Grand Voyages (German Edition) pl. 36*  
Collection of Dr. John Rahhal



**CEREMONIES PERFORMED BY THE SATOURIOUA BEFORE SETTING OFF TO WAR, by Theodore de Bry (1591)**

Colored engraving after original painting by Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues in 1564

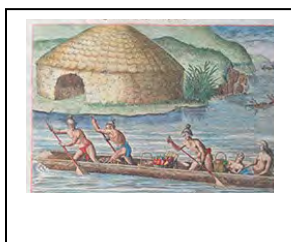
*The French in Florida, Part 1 of Grand Voyages (German Edition) pl. 11*  
Collection of Dr. John Rahhal



**THE ERECTION OF TROPHIES AND THE CEREMONIES INTENDED TO CELEBRATE THE DEFEAT OF THE ENEMY, by Theodore de Bry (1591)**

Colored engraving after original painting by Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues in 1564

*The French in Florida, Part 1 of Grand Voyages (German Edition) pl. 16*  
Collection of Dr. John Rahhal



**THE INDUSTRY OF THE FLORIDANS IN STORING THE PRODUCTS OF THE HARVEST, by Theodore de Bry (1591)**

Colored engraving after original painting by Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues in 1564

*The French in Florida, Part 1 of Grand Voyages (German Edition) pl. 22*  
Collection of Dr. John Rahhal



**HOW THEY DECLARE WAR, by Theodore de Bry (1591)**

Colored engraving after original painting by Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues in 1564

*The French in Florida, Part 1 of Grand Voyages (German Edition) pl. 33*  
Collection of Dr. John Rahhal



**THE TOWN OF POMEIOCK, by Theodore de Bry (1591)**

Colored engraving after original painting by John White in 1585

*The Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia, Part 2 of Grand Voyages (German Edition) pl. 19*  
Collection of Dr. John Rahhal



**THE RECREATIONAL WALKS OF THE KING AND QUEEN, by Theodore de Bry (1591)**

Colored engraving after original painting by Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues in 1564

*The French in Florida, Part 1 of Grand Voyages (German Edition) pl. 39*  
Collection of Dr. John Rahhal



**FUNERAL CEREMONIES IN THE HONOR OF KING AND QUEENS, by Theodore de Bry (1591)**

Colored engraving after original painting by Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues in 1564

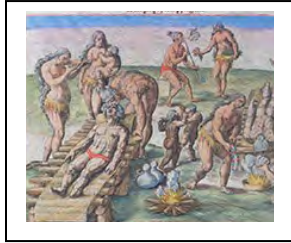
*The French in Florida, Part 1 of Grand Voyages (German Edition) pl. 40*  
Collection of Dr. John Rahhal



**HOW THE FLORDIANS DELIBERATE ON IMPORTANT MATTERS, by Theodore de Bry (1591)**

Colored engraving after original painting by Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues in 1564

*The French in Florida, Part 1 of Grand Voyages (German Edition) pl. 29*  
Collection of Dr. John Rahhal



***HOW THE INDIANS CURE THEIR SICK*, by Theodore de Bry (1591)**

Colored engraving after original painting by Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues in 1564

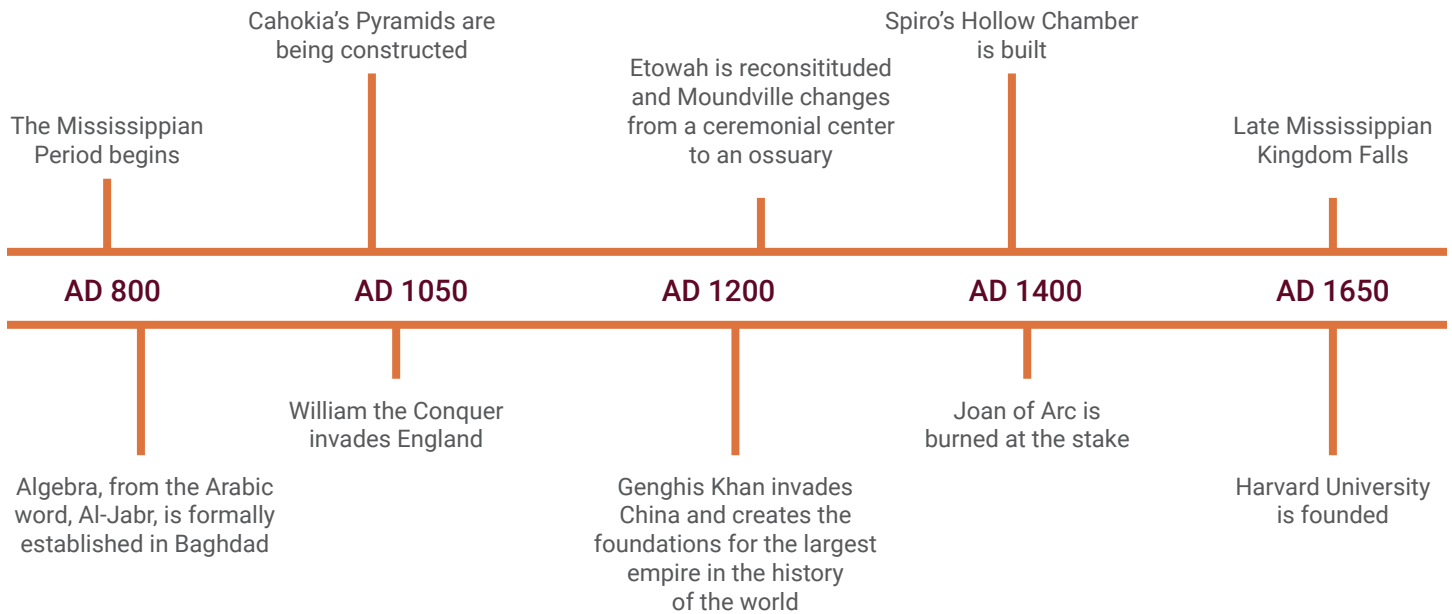
*The French in Florida*, Part 2 of *Grand Voyages* (German Edition) pl. 20  
Collection of Dr. John Rahhal



***AT THE BEGINNING OF THEIR CAMPAIGN OUTINA CONSULTS HIS SORCERER*, by Theodore de Bry (1591)**

Colored engraving after original painting by Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues in 1564

*The French in Florida*, Part 1 of *Grand Voyages* (German Edition) pl. 12  
Collection of Dr. John Rahhal



## Spiro: Site and Ceremony

### The Little Ice Age

By AD 1400, the eastern half of North America was undergoing extreme climatic change. Once fertile lands were decimated by prolonged periods of drought. One significant phase, evidence by soil samples, took place between AD 1378 – 1401. It effected not only Spiro, but likely all the large ceremonial centers across the eastern half of North America. This drought coincides with the creation of a Hollow Chamber, or Spirit Lodge, built at Spiro and may have been the reason for its creation. This Little Ice Age, which likely ushered the collapse of the Mississippian culture, lasted until approximately AD 1650.

Today, we use science to understand the world around us. Science allows us to see environmental changes and influences how we will respond. In the Mississippian period, they used religion. Just like the genesis story in the Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), Indigenous people knew how the world was created. It was brought into existence through a series of songs, prayers, and actions by supernatural characters—such as Morning Star, Evening Star, the Hero Twins, and the Underwater Serpent. To remake the world and end the drought, ritual leaders appeared to have come together at Spiro to reenact this narrative.

Based on the quantity, quality, and types of objects (from across the known world) found at Spiro, and the large number of temporary housing recently excavated at the site, a ritual remaking of the world was likely what was attempted at Spiro. Revitalization movements, such as this, are more common that most people think. In the 1700s and 1800s countless revitalization movements occurred and for various reasons. The most notable of these is the Ghost Dance—a ritual that spread across nearly all North America and was embraced by numerous Indigenous communities.



# Shell

## Lightning Whelk

The use of shell in North America dates back nearly 6,000 years. In the Mississippian period, it was used in a ritualistic manner. The primary shell used in ceremonies was the Lightning Whelk (*Busycon Sinistrum*). This type of whelk comes from the eastern shores of the Gulf of Mexico near the Florida Keys, and, to a limited degree, the southwestern shore of Veracruz, Mexico. These shells were most often used as cups. Ritual leaders, warriors, and community members drank Datura or Black Drink from them—drinks that produced euphoric feelings or hallucinations. The cone, found in the shells' interior, was removed, and often used as a necklace, while the exteriors were incised, and possibly painted, with ritualistic designs.

(Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,406 miles)



## Dwarf Olive Shell

The Dwarf Olive Shell (*Olivella Dama*) is a small oval shaped shell found in the Gulf of California. These shells were used as beads in the Mississippian period and were collected in great quantities. Presently, 13,948 shell beads have been identified at Spiro.

(Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,339 miles)





## Mineral

### Obsidian

Obsidian is a naturally occurring volcanic glass produced when lava, containing specific minerals, cools rapidly and with slight crystal growth. Obsidian can be very sharp. In fact, obsidian is used in hospitals and other industries today as a cutting tool. Based on a mineral analysis, the exact location where the obsidian was created can be identified. Obsidian at Spiro came from Hidalgo, Mexico, near the city of Pachuca, north of Mexico City.

(Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,309 miles)

### Quartz

Quartz is the most abundant mineral found on the surface of the earth. It is transparent (clear) and likely mined in the Mississippian Period on the Atlantic coast—although today, mines have been located throughout North America and as close to Spiro in Arkansas. Quartz was found in its raw crystalline form at Spiro as well as carved into various animals and arrow points.

(Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,104 miles)

### Copper

Copper is a pinkish-orangish mineral that is soft and resistant to corrosion. The earliest evidence of Native American copper mining in North America dates back 8,000 years. The first mines were located on the Keweenaw Peninsula of Michigan on Lake Superior. It is estimated that 5,000 mines were created to harvest copper in that area alone. Copper can also be found in the Appalachian Mountains, Nova Scotia, and as surface finds. Surface found copper is typically found in a ball and was formed and brought to the surface when the glaciers retreated nearly 10,000 years ago.

(Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,216 miles)

## Stone

### Flint Clay

Flint Clay is a type of red rock, similar in appearance to Catlinite. It formed in the Pennsylvania Subperiod of the Carboniferous era. This period lasted between 318 million and 299 million years ago. Flint Clay is very soft, making it easy to carve. Almost all the items from the Mississippian period that are made from this rock are pipes. The quarry site for Flint Clay is located just outside of modern St. Louis Missouri and the Mississippian Ceremonial Center of Cahokia.

(Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 437 miles)

### Catlinite

Catlinite, otherwise known as pipestone, is a soft red siltstone that is easy to carve and is used to make pipes by Indigenous people across North America. It is found in Wisconsin, Missouri, Ohio, and Minnesota. The only source of pure Catlinite is in Southwestern Minnesota at what is today Pipestone National Monument. In the post-European period, the pipes made from this stone were called Calumets, a French word meaning pipe. They were used in rituals and ceremonies. One pipe, made from Catlinite, was found at Spiro, and was carved in the form of a serpent or underworld creature.

(Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 717 miles)

## Pearls

### Freshwater Pearls

Freshwater pearls in North America come from mollusks, or mussels. They are found in nearly every lake, river, and water source, making them easy to acquire. The earliest evidence for the use of mussels dates back 6,500 years, in the Tennessee River Valley, where they were used for food and decoration. Starting around 1,000 B.C., in what is known as the Woodland period (1,000 B.C. – 1,000 A.D.), large caches of pearls were acquired and placed in mounds and/or used by community leaders. In the Mississippian period, caches were kept in large baskets containing thousands of pearls as well as being worn as necklaces. In the Hollow Chamber at Spiro, tens of thousands of pearls were said to be stored in large baskets.

(Distance traveled to reach Spiro – unknown)

## Styles From Different Regions

In the worlds of art and archaeology, the term STYLE refers to the formal qualities of a work of art or an artifact (line, shape, proportion, pattern, etc.). These are the characteristics of an object that allow it to be grouped together with similar works. Style analysis of the objects found within the Hollow Chamber of the Craig Mound at Spiro, and in the burials beneath it, reveals that many objects were imported from different regions across the southeastern United States and probably arrived at Spiro through a system of interregional exchange.

For example, many of the flint-clay pipes and Braden-style engraved shell cups discovered in the Craig Mound were probably imported from the Cahokia region of the central Mississippi Valley. Copper objects, as well as carved shell gorgets and woven baskets, were most likely brought in from such far-flung areas as the Great Lakes, the Tennessee River Valley, and the southern Gulf Coast.

The motifs and symbols incised on their surfaces link many of these objects. Currently, most of this symbolic imagery is thought to be linked to prehistoric Native American cosmology, as well as to beliefs in specific

gods, supernatural beings, and culture heroes. Because so many of these objects carry the same symbols and motifs, they clearly represented aspects of a sacred cosmological system in which the inhabitants of Spiro also participated.

Such works are believed to have been imbued with aspects of supernatural power, and many were undoubtedly worn as elite regalia. Thus, style not only indicated points of origin, it also identified the individuals who used these objects as bringers of balance to the natural and supernatural realms inherent in the cosmology of ancient Spiro.

## **The Spirit Lodge: Ritual Revival of the World**

By 1400 AD, the ancient ceremonial centers of the Mississippian culture were being abandoned. The artifacts and relics of that previous age, however, continued to be treasured and used in ceremonies. Elites used these ancient objects, and their historical connections, as proof of their ruling status and as vehicles for shaping their environment and world.

Presently, the most spectacular of these remaining sites was Spiro. Here a large Hollow Chamber, or Spirit Lodge was erected within a nearly 33-foot-high mound. This hollow room—approximately 16 feet wide and 16 feet high—was positioned on top of a mound that held the remains and ritual items of over 800 years of Caddoan elite. Within the Hollow Chamber, ancient Spiroan leaders placed objects of incredible richness and extraordinary quantity, taken from many areas of the Mississippian world.

These objects were positioned side-by-side and when viewed together told the story of creation. Since the Mississippian people did not have writing, these objects, with their engraved images, functioned as a pictographic writing system, similar to the bible telling the story of Genesis. The Spiroan creation episode, seen in dances, stories, and rituals explained the birth of the world. The hope was this Spirit Lodge, along with the ritual actions of the Spiroan elite, would physically change the world and counter the environmental transformations associated with the Little Ice Age. For the ancient Mississippians, this lodge, and the objects held within, were their only answer to the changing weather patterns affecting their climate, crops, and culture.

## **Gorgets**

Gorgets are symbols of rank and prestige. Each carried supernatural powers benefiting the wearer. Most gorgets in the Mississippian period were made from the shell of the lightning whelk. Sometimes, they were carved from the shell of an already incised medicine cup. The size of the gorget can tell you how large the original shell was in which it was created.

## **Inside the Hollow Chamber**

The Hollow Chamber created at Spiro was similar in appearance to Pawnee, Arikara, and Hidatsa earth lodges. Sometimes referred to as a Spirit Lodge, the Hollow Chamber held a vast array of ritual objects produced locally (at or near Spiro) and imported from other Mississippian ceremonial centers.

The Hollow Chamber was constructed atop the Craig Mound's Great Mortuary. Similar in shape to a tipi, the Spirit Lodge's walls were supported using cedar poles and dried clay. The interior walls and floor were likely lined with woven mats and multicolored textiles.

The original entrance to the Chamber was through a door in the Mound's north side. After the ritual objects were placed inside the chamber in specifically prepared locations, and all ritual activities performed, the door was permanently sealed.

These sacred objects consisted of carved wooden masks, stone effigy pipes, copper plates, symbolic weaponry, and woven baskets. The woven baskets, referred to as God Boxes, each had unique designs woven into them and contained an assortment of items including complete outfits. These outfits identified the wearer as a ritual performer and sacred entity. The God Boxes were placed along the east side of the Hollow Chamber.

Behind these baskets were positioned wooden figures that were almost certainly associated with the Morning Star cycle creation story—namely, that of Morning Star and his two sons.

On the west side of the chamber were over 100 engraved shell cups and 700 hundred unengraved cups. The engraved cups were arranged to form a series of tableau (a grouping of objects that forms a complete scene). These scenes told mythic narratives about supernatural beings and how the world came into existence.

(To see a Pawnee earth lodge, please go outside and visit the intertribal village in Liichokoshkomo').



## Spiro: Site and Ceremony Object Labels



### EMBOSSSED PLATE

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 900 – 1450  
Copper  
Ohio History Connection, A3490/258

This plate shows the head of a decapitated warrior. Similar images are found on engraved shells throughout the Mississippian world. It is thought that this image is tied to Mississippian folklore and represents the beheading of one of the *Hero Twins*, mythological brothers who battled giants. This narrative is very old and stretches into Central America. The Maya and Aztecs share a similar story reinforcing the idea of a shared belief system in the Americas.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,216 miles



### EMBOSSSED HUMAN HEAD EFFIGY PLATE

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Copper  
Ohio History Connection, A1393/000001A

This image shows the head of a decapitated warrior. It is nearly identical to the image seen in the embossed plate.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,216 miles



### WOODEN PLATE WITH REPOUSSÉ COPPER OVERLAY

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 900 – 1450  
Copper  
Ohio History Connection, A3490/24001

Repoussé is a metalworking technique in which a malleable metal is shaped by hammering from the reverse side to create a design in low relief. Chasing, or embossing, refers to a similar technique, in which the piece is hammered on the front side, sinking the metal.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,216 miles



#### REPOUSSÉ PLATE OF BIRD EFFIGY

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1250 – 1450  
Copper  
Gilcrease Museum, 63.376

This image of a hawk was part of a stack of copper plates with nearly identical images overlaid on each other. The hawk is a powerful animal in both the real and supernatural worlds. The hawk can be identified by the eye surround which resembles a boomerang. Supernatural characters use this same eye surround to tie their power to this bird.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,216 miles



#### REPOUSSÉ PLATE OF BIRD EFFIGY

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1250 – 1450  
Copper  
Oklahoma Historical Society, 6209



#### REPOUSSÉ PLATE DEPICTING HUMAN HEAD WITH LONG-NOSE EAR ORNAMENTS

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1250 – 1450  
Copper  
Gilcrease Museum, 63.384

This plate depicts a decapitated human head. It is likely tied to a supernatural narrative and references a specific person. In the person's ears are human-head-effigy earspools. Unlike the ones seen in the Mississippian gallery and in the ears of the "Big Boy" pipe, these human-head-effigy earspools show a long bulbous nose.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,216 miles



#### REPOUSSÉ PLATE OF HUMAN HAND WITH EYE MOTIF

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1250 – 1450  
Copper  
Collection of Dr. Jim Cox

The human hand is depicted on multiple mediums during the Mississippian period and continuing into today. The eye motif, seen in the palm, is likely a portal allowing individuals to move between realms. The hand represents the constellation Orion in the night sky and is connected to the Milky Way and the entrance to the afterlife.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,216 miles

#### COPPER PENDANT WITH BASKETRY FRAGMENTS

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 900 – 1450  
Copper  
Collection of Dr. Jim Cox



#### ENGRAVED SHELL CUP WITH HUMAN EFFIGY IMAGES DRAWN IN

RELIEF Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1100 – 1250  
Marine Shell  
Braden Style  
National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum

Unlike incising, which is the act of cutting a line into an object, the image depicted in this cup was created in relief. This means the material around the image was removed, so the picture rises above the background. This image likely shows supernatural characters dancing. The characters are covered in paint or tattoos.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,406 miles



#### ENGRAVED SHELL CUP WITH HUMAN FACE ON SHELL OF TURTLE

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1100 – 1250  
Marine Shell  
Craig Style  
Le Flore County Historical Society

The face incised on the back of the turtle is depicted on various other items found at Spiro. In certain folkloric narratives, the *Hero Twins* fought alongside allies who battled giants and other creatures. One of these allies was Turtle. Turtle could transform into a person when needed, so it may be that this human/turtle hybrid is connected to that story.

Turtles are connected to the larger belief system in both North and Central America through its association with the creation of the world. It was believed that the earth sits in a primordial sea on the back of a turtle.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,406 miles



#### ENGRAVED SHELL CUP WITH HUMAN FACE MOTIF

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Marine Shell  
Braden Style  
Gilcrease Museum, 90.385

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,406 miles



#### ENGRAVED SHELL CUP WITH HUMAN FACE MOTIF

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Marine Shell  
Craig Style  
Gilcrease Museum, 90.542

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,406 miles



#### ENGRAVED SHELL CUP WITH SUPERNATURAL CHARACTER

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1100 – 1250  
Marine Shell  
Braden Style  
Gilcrease Museum, 90.1697

Indigenous people believed in rebirth. This was likely tied to their clan and family structure. This image shows a supernatural character dancing with an eagle-feather fan and cape in front of the Pleiades constellation. Constellations, and the night sky, were very important to the Mississippian people. They act as entrance points to the afterlife but also exits. It may be that the person depicted in this cup is the *Lord of the Pleiades* and guards the exit from the afterlife back to earth. It is probable that a person would have to pass by the *Lord of the Pleiades* before returning to their clan or family.

Modern communities still use the eagle feather dance fan.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,406 miles



**ENGRAVED SHELL CUP WITH HUMAN FACE MOTIF**

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1100 – 1250  
Marine Shell  
Craig Style  
Gilcrease Museum, 90.386

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,406 miles



**ENGRAVED SHELL CUP WITH TWO SUPERNATURAL FIGURES WITH SNAKE  
EXTREMITIES DANCING ABOVE A COILED SNAKE**

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Marine Shell  
Craig Style  
National Museum of the American Indian, 2189083

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,406 miles



**ENGRAVED SHELL CUP WITH TREE OF LIFE MOTIF**

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1100 – 1250  
Marine Shell  
Craig Style  
National Museum of the American Indian, 189120

This image shows a depiction of the *Tree of Life*. It was believed that a tree of life was the bridge between the supernatural realms (above and below) and the real world. Medicine leaders, as well as supernatural characters, could use this bridge as a portal similar to an elevator.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,406 miles





#### ENGRAVED SHELL CUP WITH BIRDMAN MOTIF

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1100 – 1250  
Marine Shell  
Craig Style  
National Museum of the American Indian, 189121.

This image shows a supernatural character known as *Birdman*. Above him is a step motif, which may be connected to the layered supernatural realm of the cosmos. Similar iconography can be seen in the North American Southwest on shields, paintings, tattoos and other mediums indicating a shared belief system across North and Central America.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,406 miles

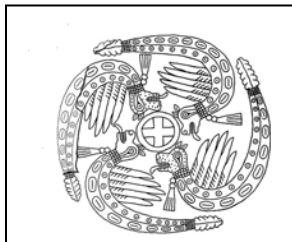


#### ENGRAVED SHELL CUP SHOWING SNAKE WITH AVIAN FEATURES

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1100 – 1250  
Marine Shell  
Craig Style  
University of Arkansas, 37-4-45

Composite creatures containing human and animal characteristics are very common in the Mississippian period. It is unknown what they represent, but it is likely tied to deities and supernatural events.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,406 miles



#### ENGRAVED SHELL CUP WITH FOUR WINGED SERPENTS SURROUNDING A CROSS-IN-CIRCLE MOTIF

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1100 – 1250  
Marine Shell  
Craig Style  
University of Arkansas, 37-4-39

This image shows four underwater serpents around a cross-in-circle motif. In the tri-layered belief system (found in North and Central America) the cross-in-circle is a symbol denoting the real world, or world where humans reside.

In certain folkloric narratives, about the creation of the world, the world sits on the back of a turtle in a primordial sea. At first, the world rocked and moved, and was unstable. In order to bring stability to the world, four underwater creatures moved to the four corners of the world and stabilized it on their backs. The cup, therefore, acts like books but the narrative is told through imagery.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,406 miles



#### ENGRAVED SHELL CUP FRAGMENT WITH UNDERWATER PANTHER MOTIF

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1100 – 1250  
Marine Shell  
Craig Style  
University of Arkansas, 37-4-43

The underwater panther is a creature that inhabits the night sky or beneath world. The above world and below world move through the course of the day so that the above world is represented as daytime and the beneath world as nighttime.

Depending on the region, the underwater panther could be seen as a underwater serpent, monster with horns and wings, or a mix of all three. This image has characteristics seen in 19<sup>th</sup> century Lakota ledger art, reinforcing religious and cultural continuation following the decline of the Mississippian culture.

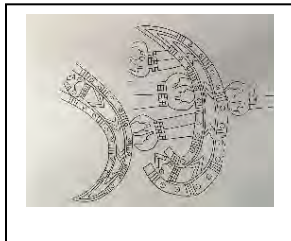


#### ENGRAVED SHELL CUP FRAGMENT WITH INTERTWINED SNAKES

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1100 – 1250  
Marine Shell  
Holly Bluff Style  
University of Arkansas, 37-4-17

The images seen on this cup are of intertwined snakes. For many years, it was thought that only two regional styles of image design were seen at Spiro—those called Braden, which originated at Cahokia, and those called Craig, which come from Spiro and the surrounding area. However, recent style analysis concludes that a third style exists. Called Holly Bluff, this style comes from the Moundville, Alabama region and incorporates snakes and other underworld motifs.

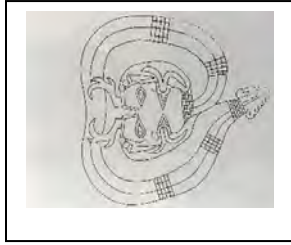
Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,406 miles



#### ENGRAVED SHELL CUP FRAGMENT SHOWING SNAKE AND AVIAN FEATURES

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1100 – 1250  
Marine Shell  
Craig Style  
University of Arkansas, 37-4-45

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,406 miles



**ENGRAVED SHELL CUP SHOWING ANTLERED JANUS (TWO-FACED) HUMAN-HEAD RATTLESNAKE**

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Marine Shell  
Craig Style  
University of Arkansas, 37-4-32



**ENGRAVED SHELL CUP WITH TWO IMAGES OF T-BAR**

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Marine Shell  
Craig Style  
University of Arkansas, 37-4-40



**ENGRAVED SHELL GORGET WITH HUMAN HEAD EFFIGIES IN RELIEF**

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Marine Shell  
Craig Style  
National Museum of the American Indian, 18/9084

This gorget was created in relief and has five heads floating over a cross-in-circle motif. It is not known what this represents, but the cross-in-circle motif represents the world occupied by humans in the Mississippian belief system.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,406 miles



**ENGRAVED SHELL GORGET OF HUMAN HANDS**

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Marine Shell  
Craig Style  
Gilcrease Museum, 90.451

This gorget depicts human hands with a cross-in-circle motif on the palms. It was worn around the neck of an individual. The hand motif is related to the constellation Orion in the night sky and is tied to the Milky Way and entrance to the afterlife.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,406 miles



**ENGRAVED SHELL GORGET WITH TWO DANCING FIGURES HOLDING RATTLES AND DRUMS**

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
 Spiro Site  
 AD 1200 – 1450  
 Marine Shell  
 Craig Style  
 Woolaroc Museum and Wildlife Preserve

This image shows two figures dancing around a pole with a raccoon attached to the top. This image should be viewed in 3 dimensions with the outer circle representing a dance circle. The pole is likely the representations of the Axis Mundi, or tree of life. The Axis Mundi can be thought of as an elevator that connects the tri-layered universe together. It also allowed medicine leaders to communicate with the supernatural realms, and the entities who reside in those realms, to move back and forth between our world and their own. The dancers hold drums and rattles and are wearing headdresses. All three of these items are still used today in indigenous communities.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,406 miles



**ENGRAVED AND CARVED HUMAN EFFIGY FIGURE**

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
 Spiro Site  
 AD 1200 – 1450  
 Marine Shell  
 Craig Style  
 Woolaroc Museum and Wildlife Preserve

This image shows a human effigy figure. Holes were drilled in the head and back of the figure and it was worn as a bead or necklace.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,406 miles



**ENGRAVED SHELL GORGET WITH HANDS AND SPIDER**

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
 Spiro Site  
 AD 1200 – 1450  
 Marine Shell  
 Craig Style  
 Oklahoma Historical Society, 6408

This gorget was once a larger medicine cup and was cut from the upper curved portion of the Lightning Whelk shell. This image likely represents a map of the universe. On the reverse of the shell are lines representing the chaos before creation. From the chaos came spider, who brought life to the earth. She entered the world from the beneath realm, represented by the swirl pattern in the center. She sits on the earth, which is represented by the circle that surrounds her. This is a dance circle. The hands surrounding the scene represent the constellation Orion and the Milky Way and the entrance into afterlife. The “tufts” surrounding the hands, are eagle feather tufts and represent the above world.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,406 miles



**ENGRAVED SHELL BEAD**  
Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Marine Shell  
Braden Style  
Gilcrease Museum, 90.535

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,406 miles



**BEADED NECKLACE**  
Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Marine Shell  
Gilcrease Museum, 383

These beads came from the Sea of Cortez and shows the extensive trade routes that were utilized by Indigenous people across the Americas.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,339 miles



**ENGRAVED SHELL PENDANT**  
Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Marine Shell  
Minneapolis Institute of Art, 91.37.1

This image is of the sun and was created in relief. In the Mississippian world, leaders of communities were often deified and referred to as the *Sun*. This was due to the power of their position and their relationship to the supernatural realm. This may have been a symbol of authority—similar to a crown or scepter in other cultures around the world.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,406 miles



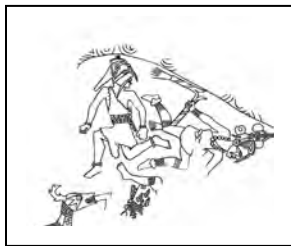


### ENGRAVED SHELL PENDANT

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Marine Shell with copper  
Minneapolis Institute of Art, 91.37.2

This image shows the hand-and-eye motif that is associated with the night sky and the entrance to the afterlife. This might have been worn by a medicine leader to signify their position in the community and reinforce their power.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,406 miles



### ENGRAVED SHELL CUP

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Marine Shell  
Lightner Museum, 1920.1.46 a-c

These images show the *Hero Twins*. Called *Thunder* and *Lightning* in some stories, they are referred to as civilized boy and wild boy in others. In the Mississippian belief system, as twins, they are one in the same individual. The third figure on this cup shows the combining of each twin's characteristics—marking them as the same person.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,406 miles



### ASSORTED BEADS AND OTHER SHELL

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Marine Shell  
Le Flore Country Historical Society

The columella is the central axis of the lightening whelk shell. It was often worn as a necklace by community leaders and supernatural beings.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,406 miles



### MINERAL SPRINGS KNIFE

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Stone  
Gilcrease Museum, 61.14196

This knife is known as a biface blade because it is sharpened on both sides. Gahagan, Mineral Springs, and Kay knives are large and often have little notches at the end. Their size and shape indicate that they were symbolic weapons and not used in a utilitarian fashion.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 230 miles



### KAY KNIFE

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Stone  
Gilcrease Museum, 61.4308

The stone used to make these knives comes from south-central Kansas and north-central Oklahoma. This stone source was used for arrow points and other chipped stone tools into the 1700s at ancestral Wichita village sites in Kay County, Oklahoma (North of Ponca City).

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 230 miles



### KAY KNIFE

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Stone  
Gilcrease Museum, 61.14200



### TRIBUTE POINT

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Stone  
Collection of Dr. John Rahhal

One specific type of arrow point found at Spiro is known as a tribute point. These are exceptionally rare items and are very thin.

During the Early to Middle Mississippian period, arrow points deposited in graves would likely have been part of complete arrows, sometimes with bows, rather than as loose stone tips. Excavators often

emphasized the similar orientation of clustered points in burial features from southern Caddoan sites in the Red River Valley, East Texas, and southwest Arkansas, and interpreted these as quivers of arrows.

Caches or quivers of arrows were also included in Early Mississippian period deposits at Cahokia's Mound 72, another cosmogram that dates about three hundred years earlier than Spiro's Great Mortuary. There are few direct ties to Cahokia in the Spiro arrow points. This stands in contrast to the links with Cahokia shown by the copper and shell objects in the *Hollow Chamber*.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Between 230 – 500 miles



#### LONG-HANDLED SPATULATE CELT

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 900 – 1150  
Stone  
Oklahoma Historical Society, 6399

This object is part of a large quantity of crafted symbolic weapons. Although found at Spiro, many of these were crafted in other midsouthern towns and centers—likely in the Tennessee/Mississippi/Alabama area. They were used by ritual leaders to reenact events associated with supernatural characters including mortal combat and dismemberments.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Unknown

#### RITUALISTICALLY KILLED BLADE

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 900 – 1450  
Stone, Kaolin Chert  
Collection of Dr. John Rahhal

This blade was ritualistically broken before being enclosed with the other items in the Hollow Chamber.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Unknown



#### CROWN-FORM MACE

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 900 – 1450  
Stone  
Gilcrease Museum, 61.18906

This object reflects the beliefs and narratives associated with the *Hero Twins*, whose epic adventures are recounted in widespread mythic accounts that survive to the present day. Fighting alongside Turtle and

*He-Who-Wears-Human-Heads-as-Earrings* (aka *Redhorn* and *Morning Star*), the twins engaged in mortal combat with supernatural beings, often giants, and carried these supernatural weapons.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Unknown



#### CEREMONIAL MACE

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 900 – 1450  
Stone  
Gilcrease Museum, 61.4158

This mace was part of an assortment of symbolic weapons found at Spiro and likely used in ritual performances by medicine leaders. The maces, axes, and blades are real world representations of supernatural weapons possessed by deities, especially the *Hero Twins*.

The weapons could not be held or used by just anyone but were possessed by religious leaders or doctors who were part of secretive medicine societies. Certain Osage elders today believe that this mace is in the form of a sturgeon (fish) and represents one such society.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Unknown



#### CEREMONIAL MACE

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 900 – 1450  
Stone  
Gilcrease Museum, 61.18905



#### MONOLITHIC AXE

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1300 – 1400  
Stone  
Gilcrease Museum, 61.18910

Sacred weaponry moved throughout the Mississippian region by way of trade, marriage, and secret-society memberships. Power was bestowed to society members by cosmic interactions with guardian spirits, supernatural animals, and weather phenomena through dreams, prayers, and visions.



#### MONOLITHIC AXE

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1300 – 1400  
Stone  
Gilcrease Museum, 61.1781

Symbolic weapons with specific forms are tied to certain supernatural entities and ritual regalia. This axe was created to look like a gar fish and would likely have been used in connection with a complete outfit to tie it directly to a supernatural character. The person using this weapon would employ it in public performances to ensure their connection to the supernatural realm and the power that realm contained.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Unknown



#### MONOLITHIC AXE

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1300 – 1400  
Stone  
Gilcrease Museum, 61.18991

The performances undertaken using this item not only portrayed events from an earlier, powerful dawn-time in the Mississippian belief system, but also allowed those potent powers to be harnessed and deployed publicly for all to see.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Unknown



#### AXE IN THE FORM OF A WOODPECKER

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1300 – 1400  
Cedar, copper, marine shell  
Museum of Native American History

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Copper 1,216 miles



#### ASSORTED TRIBUTE POINTS

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1300 – 1400  
Cedar, copper, marine shell  
Collection of Dr. Jim Cox





**T-SHAPED PIPE**  
 Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
 Spiro Site  
 AD 900 – 1400  
 Ceramic  
 Oklahoma Historical Society, 6407

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Unknown



**T-SHAPED PIPE**  
 Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
 Spiro Site  
 AD 900 – 1400  
 Ceramic  
 Collection of Dr. John Rahhal

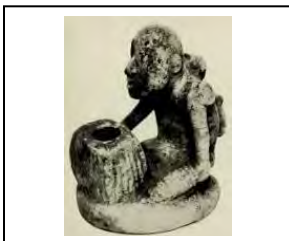
Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Unknown



**TURTLE EFFIGY**  
 Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
 Spiro Site  
 AD 900 – 1400  
 Stone  
 Collection of Dr. Jim Cox, pg. 133

Turtle was a mythical warrior who battled giants alongside the *Hero Twins* in Indigenous folklore. He had the ability to change forms—from human to turtle—depending on his need. Turtle also represented the foundation of the world in North and Central American belief system. The earth sat on the turtle's back, while the turtle floated in the primordial sea.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Unknown



**EARTHMOTHER EFFIGY PIPE**  
 Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
 Spiro Site  
 AD 900 – 1400  
 Stone  
 National Museum of the American Indian, 189112.000

*Earthmother* is a supernatural entity and the wife of *Morning Star*—a figure that can be seen in this gallery physically represented as a Flint Clay pipe. *Earthmother* is connected to rebirth and is associated with fertility and corn. Corn is one aspect of her earthly manifestation. She is seen in the night sky as the planet Venus.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 437 miles



**WARRIOR EFFIGY PIPE**

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1100 – 1200  
Flint Clay  
Gilcrease Museum, 61.14172

This pipe shows the humanly form of the warrior Turtle. He is outfitted with armor and is sitting over the body of a fallen enemy. The enemy's head is turned sideways in his hand. Markings on this pipe appear in two forms—those original to the piece, and those that were added at a later date. The later scratches correspond to Northern Plains war paint and tattoos. These war markings take the form of straight lines beginning at the shoulder and extending down the arm. It is likely that this pipe was scratched as part of a ritual ceremony extolling the war honors taken by Turtle in supernatural combat.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 437 miles



**WARRIOR EFFIGY PIPE**

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1100 – 1200  
Flint Clay  
National Museum of the American Indian, 21/4088

This pipe likely shows another anthropomorphic (human-like) representation of the mythical warrior Turtle. Turtle is standing over the body of a fallen warrior and in his hand is a weapon similar in shape to a snapping turtle's beak. He is armored and was likely dressed as a sapper, or armored warrior, known for storming palisaded fortifications.

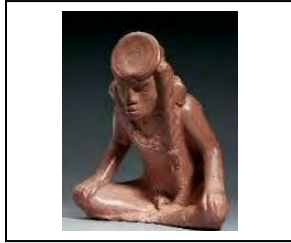
Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 437 miles



**OTHER-THAN-HUMAN-EFFIGY PIPE**

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1100 – 1200  
Flint Clay  
Oklahoma Historical Society

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 437 miles



#### **EFFIGY PIPE OF SEATED MALE FIGURE.**

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1100 – 1200  
Flint Clay  
University of Arkansas, 47-2-1

Known as *Resting Warrior (Big Boy)* and identified as *Morning Star* or the hero *Redhorn*, this pipe represents one of the chief deities in Native American ideology. *Morning Star* was the god of war and moved across the night sky as a comet. In Pawnee mythology, he brought the world fire and was the husband of Evening Star. He is represented in the night sky as Mars or Venus depending on the time of year.

In his ears are short nosed maskettes—similar to the pair seen in the previous gallery. These likely represent the *Hero Twins* and show his connection to these supernatural characters.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 437 miles

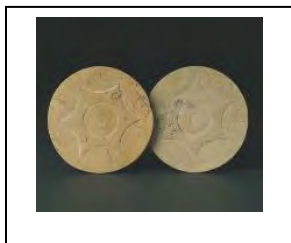


#### **BIRD EFFIGY EARSPOOL**

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Marine shell with copper  
Minneapolis Institute of Art, 2001.28.1

Avian (bird) imagery is associated with the above world and supernatural powers. The individual who wore this earpool was likely a medicine leader and held powers associated with the upper world.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Copper 1,216 miles and shell 1,406 miles



#### **SIX-POINTED STAR EARSPOOLS**

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Stone  
Collection of Dr. John Rahhal

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Unknown



#### EARSPOOL

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Stone and Copper  
Gilcrease Museum, 61.2165

The motif seen on this earspool is likely stars in the night sky. Similar images have been identified in the North American Southwest and seen on historical shields.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Unknown



#### EARSPOOL WITH BIRD MOTIF

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Stone and Copper  
Gilcrease Museum, 61.3011

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Unknown



#### EARSPOOL

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Stone and Copper  
Gilcrease Museum, 61.4276a

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Unknown



#### EARSPOOL

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Stone and Copper  
Gilcrease Museum, 61.4276b

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Unknown



### EARSPOOLS WITH CROSS-IN-CIRCLE MOTIF

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Stone and Copper  
Oklahoma Historical Society, 6322.1-2

Similar images have been identified in the North American Southwest and seen on historical shields. One example is from a hide painting from the early 1700s in which Spanish soldiers are attacking a fortified community on the North American Great Plains. Although identified as Apache, the fortification is likely Wichita with one individual holding a shield showing the same design.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Unknown



### EFFIGY BOATSTONE WITH OWL AND FELINE HEADS

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Quartz  
National Museum of the American Indian, 189113

Not only did Spiro contain artifacts from across the Mississippian world, there were older pre-Mississippian period objects that may have been kept as heirlooms. One notable example of this are boatstones. Boatstones were objects that would have been attached as weights to atlatls or throwing sticks during the Woodland period (BC 1000 - AD 1000) and probably during the earlier Archaic period (BC 8000 - 1000) as well. Atlatl weights would have fallen out of use once throwing sticks were replaced by bows and arrows, about AD 600. Boatstones have been found in Late Woodland and Early Mississippian period contexts in the southern Caddoan area. The quartz crystal made into boatstones likely came from the Ouachita Mountains of Arkansas or coast of North Carolina.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Between 500 and 1,000 miles



### CRYSTAL

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Quartz  
Le Flore County Historical Society

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Between 500 and 1,000 miles





### TEXTILE

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Fibers with natural dyes  
Le Flore County Historical Society

This fragment represents one of the few remaining examples of Spiroan textiles. Before it was looted by the Pocola Mining Company, and the textiles scattered across the ground, the *Hollow Chamber* likely contained the single largest assemblage of pre-European textiles ever found in North America.

Using natural dyes made from vegetal and mineral material, the textiles would have been brightly colored. In addition to this piece of rope, textiles were woven into capes and other pieces of clothing. At the National Museum of the American Indian, there are capes with images of *Birdman* and the Ogee and Eye motif.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Unknown



### CAHOKIA-STYLE CHUNKEY GAME STONE

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Stone  
Gilcrease Museum, 61.8914

Chunkey is a game played in North America and likely goes back thousands of years. The game was heavily documented by travelers in the 17th and 18th centuries while visiting Muscogee, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Mandan, and various other tribes. Some descriptions indicate that the stones were owned by the town and others say they were owned by a clan or society.

The game is usually played between two competing men. One of the men rolls the stone and just as it is about to stop, both throw a spear at it. The Spear that lands the closest to it, wins. Chunkey is watched by large crowds who bet on the game. Depictions of chunkey stones are seen in Mississippian gorgets and in large flint clay pipes. This indicates that the game has supernatural implications and was also played by deities.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 1,410 miles

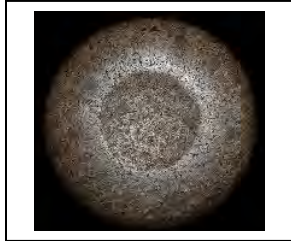


### CHUNKEY GAME STONE

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Stone  
Collection of Dr. Jim Cox

This is the largest Chunkey stone ever found. Its size, and the fact that it was found in the Hollow Chamber of Spiro, indicates that it may have held supernatural implications and be associated with a specific folkloric narrative and the ritual performances carried out at Spiro.

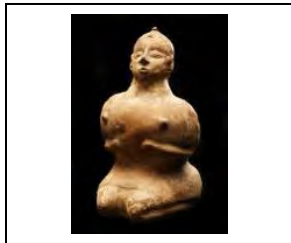
Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Unknown



#### **CHUNKEY GAME STONE**

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Stone  
Collection of Dr. Jim Cox

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Unknown



#### **HUMAN EFFIGY FIGURE – TENNESSEE STYLE**

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Ceramic  
Gilcrease Museum, 54.2071

This female effigy figure likely came from the Tennessee Cumberland area. This is indicated by the color of the vessel as well as the style of the figure. This reinforces the idea that people from all over the eastern half of North America sent objects, and likely religious leaders, to Spiro to witness and participate in the Hollow Chamber ritual.

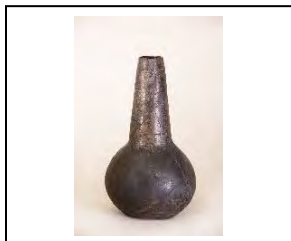
Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 737miles



#### **JAR**

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Ceramic  
Oklahoma Historical Society, 06415

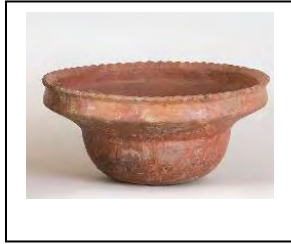
Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 315 miles



#### **WILLIAMS PLAIN BOTTLE**

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Ceramic  
Oklahoma Historical Society, 06435

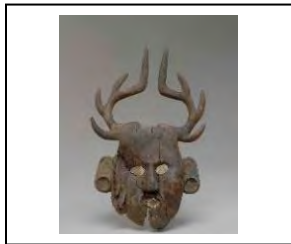
Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 315 miles



**BOWL**

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Ceramic  
Oklahoma Historical Society, 06430

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – 315 miles



**HUMAN EFFIGY FACE WITH DEER ANTLERS**

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Cedar and marine shell  
National Museum of the American Indian, 198306

Masking is a very important tradition throughout Native America. By wearing a mask, the ritual performer became one with the deity, he or she, impersonated.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Unknown

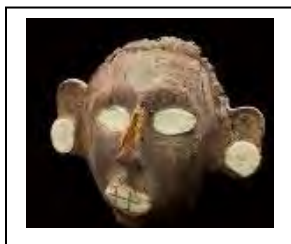


**HUMAN EFFIGY**

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Cedar with copper  
Gilcrease Museum, 73.3

This figure was one of three positioned in the north section of the Hollow Chamber. The largest of these figures was intended to be *First Man*. This figure, which sat beside *First Man*, was probably his son. *First Man*, alongside *First Woman*, were the first people on earth. According to Osage tradition, *First Man* and his sons appear in the night sky as the three stars in the belt of the constellation Orion.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Copper 1,216 miles



**HUMAN FACE EFFIGY MASK**

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Cedar, copper, marine shell  
Gilcrease Museum, 84.2138

Masks of this size were probably used as headdress and costume detail.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Copper 1,216 miles and shell 1,410 miles



**BIRD EFFIGY**

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Cedar  
Collection of Dr. Jim Cox

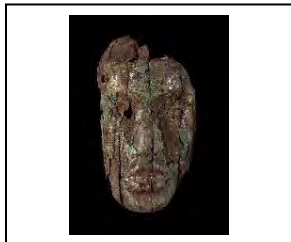
Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Unknown



**HUMAN FACE EFFIGY MASK**

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 900 – 1450  
Cedar with copper  
Oklahoma Historical Society, 06412

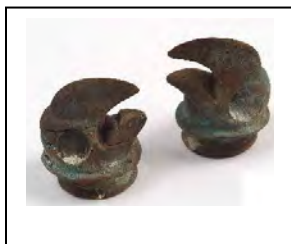
Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Copper 1,216 miles



**HUMAN FACE EFFIGY MASK**

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 900 – 1450  
Cedar with copper  
Oklahoma Historical Society

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Copper 1,216 miles



**RAPTOR EFFIGY EARSPOOLS**

Le Flore County, Oklahoma  
Spiro Site  
AD 1200 – 1450  
Cedar, copper, marine shell  
National Museum of the American Indian, 224942

This raptor effigy earspools may have served to associate the wearer with the above world or identified the wearer as a warrior.

Distance traveled to reach Spiro – Unknown

# Archaeology and Looting

**“Moving swiftly, these men (Pocola Mining Company) grabbed all the ancient relics they could sell and tossed the textiles, pot sherds, broken shell, and cedar elements onto the ground. Sections of cedar poles lay scattered on the ground, fragments of feather and fur textiles littered the whole area; it is impossible to take a single step in hundreds of square yards around the ruined structure without scuffing broken pieces of pottery, sections of engraved shell, and beads of shell, stone, and bone.”**

– Forrest E. Clements,  
head of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Oklahoma, 1945.

## The Looting of Spiro

Unfortunately, much of what we understand about the Spiro site comes to us only in bits and pieces. This site remains the location of one of the largest and longest episodes of looting at any American archaeological site in history.

First identified in 1914 by Joseph Thoburn, a professor at the University of Oklahoma, the Spiro mounds went untouched until 1933 when, during the Great Depression, the owners of the site leased the land to a group calling itself the Pocola Mining Company (PMC). Having no respect for the site or the Caddoan people who created it, they dug with reckless abandon. Soon, the PMC discovered the mound's hollow interior, containing thousands of fresh-water pearls, 800 engraved and unengraved marine shell cups, stone and wooden statuary, basketry, feathered textiles, masks, large copper plates and countless other items.

This find, however, came to the attention of Forrest Clements, at the University of Oklahoma, and soon the world. In 1935, the Kansas City Star hailed it as “A ‘King Tut Tomb’ in the Arkansas Valley” leading the state of Oklahoma to usher in new laws halting the digging.

Angered by the loss of their lease to dig and moving swiftly, the PMC grabbed all the ancient relics they could sell and tossed the textiles, pot sherds, broken shell, and cedar elements onto the ground. Unfazed by the cultural and historical crimes they had just committed, the PMC proceeded to sell this looted material to anyone who approached them. Today, we are not sure what all was taken and where it presently resides. Spread across the world, many, if not most, of these items will likely never be returned.

## Archeology at Spiro

Owing to the renewed interest in archaeology brought about by the New Deal, the state of Oklahoma stopped the commercial digging at the Spiro site. In November of 1935, the state passed legislation requiring a license for all excavations in the state, and placed control of the Spiro site in the hands of semi-experienced archaeologists at the University of Oklahoma.

Employees of the Pocola Mining Company, angered that they were denied a lease to dig, dynamited the mound, and no amount of legislation could repair the destruction. The looters were now gone and only devastation remained. This singular site, which held the keys to understanding Mississippian iconography, religion, ceremony, and countless other social, political, and trade practices, will now always remain a partial mystery as there is no way to reassemble all the items that were sold or to place them in their correct context within the mound.



Following this period of looting came the first organized attempt to excavate the Spiro site. WPA sponsored excavations began in 1936 and continued until 1941, subsidized by the wealthy philanthropist Frank Philips and academic institutions—specifically the University of Oklahoma, University of Tulsa, Wootaroc, and the Oklahoma Historical Society—in order to uncover what little remained of the mound’s contents.

Archeological excavations of the site continued for the next several decades with significant attempts to reevaluate the site taking place in the 1970s and 80s. Today, in collaboration with the Caddo Nation and Wichita and Affiliated Tribes, archaeologists from the Oklahoma and Arkansas Archaeological Surveys are using geophysical prospecting technologies, such as gradiometry and ground penetrating radar, to discover more about the site—including the construction of temporary housing at the site built around AD 1400. This discovery supports the conclusion that a large event occurred at the site around the same time the Hollow Chamber was completed.

# Looting and Archaeology Object Labels



## *WPA PHOTOGRAPH OF CRAIG MOUND*

Le Flore County, Oklahoma

Ca. 1935

Mixed Media

Sam Noble Museum of Natural History, University of Oklahoma, Norman.



## *"LOST CIVILIZATION IN OKLAHOMA MAY BE RELATED TO THE MAYAS"*

*Kansas City Star* Newspaper

Kansas City, Missouri

October 10, 1938



## *FORREST CLEMENTS*

Unknown photographer

Unknown date

Sam Noble Museum of Natural History, University of Oklahoma, Norman.



## *WPA MURAL OF HYPOTHETICAL SPIROAN CHARACTERS BASED ON OBJECTS FOUND AT SPIRO*

By Bart Ward and Oliver Meeks

1941

Courtesy of the Woolaroc Museum and Wildlife Preserve.



## *CRAIG MOUND IN THE SNOW*

Photograph by Joseph Thoburn

Le Flore County, Oklahoma

1913

Oklahoma Historical Society, Thorburn Collection



# **EXCAVATION AT NORTH END OF MAIN UNIT AT PROFILES ALONG ROWS 19, 20, 21.**

Photograph by R.E. Bell

Le Flore County, Oklahoma

Ca. 1938

Sam Noble Museum of Natural History, University of Oklahoma, Norman.



# **WPA EXCAVATION**

Unknown Photographer

Le Flore County, Oklahoma

Ca. 1938

Sam Noble Museum of Natural History, University of Oklahoma, Norman.



# **POT HUNTER DIGGING IN THE AREA OF THE THIRD MOUND UNIT OF CRAIG MOUND**

Photograph by R.E. Bell

Le Flore County, Oklahoma

Ca. 1934-35

Sam Noble Museum of Natural History, University of Oklahoma, Norman.



# **LOOTER'S TUNNEL FROM THE SPIRO SITE**

Photograph by R.E. Bell

Le Flore County, Oklahoma

Ca. 1938

Sam Noble Museum of Natural History, University of Oklahoma, Norman.



# **LEAR HOWELL AND HIS WIFE WITH LOOTED ARTIFACTS FROM SPIRO AND OTHER SURROUNDING SITES.**

Unknown Photographer

Ca. 1935

Sam Noble Museum of Natural History, University of Oklahoma, Norman.



# **"A 'King Tut' Tomb in the Arkansas Valley"**

*Kansas City Star* Newspaper

Kansas City, Missouri

December 15, 1935



### DESTROYED MOUNDS AT SPIRO SITE

Photograph by R.E. Bell

Le Flore County, Oklahoma

Ca. 1935

Sam Noble Museum of Natural History, University of Oklahoma, Norman.



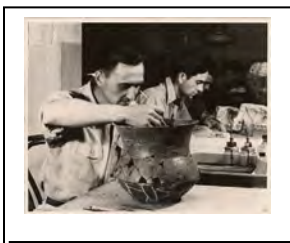
### FOUR WPA SUPERVISORS

(Left to right: David Baerreis, Kenneth Orr, Phil Newkumet, and Lynn Howard)

Le Flore County, Oklahoma

1938

Image courtesy of Tracy Newkumet Burrows



### WPA WORKS RECONSTRUCTING CERAMICS

Norman, Oklahoma

Ca. 1941

Sam Noble Museum of Natural History, University of Oklahoma, Norman



### AERIAL VIEW OF CRAIG MOUND

Photograph by Scott W. Hammerstedt

Le Flore County, Oklahoma

Spring 2019



### RECENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION AT SPIRO SITE

Le Flore County, Oklahoma

Spring 2014

Image Courtesy of the Oklahoma Archaeological Survey



### ARTIST REPRODUCTION OF ETOWAH COPPER PLATE

By James Di Loreta

Ca. 2016

Department of Anthropology, Smithsonian Institution, NHB2016-00421



#### WPA EXCAVATIONS OF CRAIG MOUND

Unknown photographer

Le Flore County, Oklahoma

Ca. 1937

Sam Noble Museum of Natural History, University of Oklahoma, Norman



#### CRAIG MOUND

By Joseph Thorburn

Le Flore County, Oklahoma

1917

Oklahoma Historical Society, Thorburn Collection



#### WPA EXCAVATION AT THE CRAIG MOUND WITH A VIEW OF THE TIP OF THE HOLLOW CHAMBER ACROSS THE COLLAPSED CENTER OF THE MOUND

Photograph by the WPA

Le Flore County, Oklahoma

1937

Collection of Dr. Jim Cox

#### WPA EXCAVATION FILM

Unknown videographer

Le Flore County, Oklahoma

Ca. 1936

Sam Noble Museum of Natural History, University of Oklahoma, Norman



# Cultural Continuation

The remarkable objects found at Spiro were produced by the ancestors of Caddo, Wichita, Pawnee, Osage, Lakota, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Muscogee, Choctaw, Potawatomi, Quapaw, Cheyenne, Seminole, and countless other Indigenous communities.

The extraordinary assemblage of objects, therefore, provides critical insight into the cosmology and culture of the ancient Mississippian people and their relationship to First American communities today from the American Southeast, Great Plains, Southwest, and possibly Mesoamerica. These artists used many of the same images in historical hide paintings, ledger drawings, tipi and shield covers, and in 20th century artwork, such as paintings, sculpture, ceramics, basketry and weavings.

## Artist Statements

### Chase Earles and Starr Hardridge

Much like what occurred at Spiro between six hundred and one thousand years ago, this plate represents the coming together of people and artists from different communities and cultures to achieve something unique. The iconography and craftsmanship of the piece is reflective of the ancient traditions of the Mississippian and Caddoan people as well as their living descendants. It is brilliant in its conception and beautiful in its execution. It is also a testament to the enduring legacy of Caddo and Muscogee people.

### Karin Walkingstick

My work is created using the slab and coil method. To create this piece, I needed to work it in two stages. I wanted the pot to be big and for the dragonfly design to cover the entire piece. I built the pot up to about halfway, turned it upside down, and began incising my design, starting with the water, lily pads, and cattails. Then it had to be turned over for coiling the upper half to the rim and incising the mosaic- patterned sky and the dragonflies. The lower half of the pot needed to be dry enough to support the upper half but moist enough to permit blending the incised designs cleanly. After stone burnishing and drying, I fired it in a kiln.

I painted the piece with bright acrylics. At that stage, it was finished, but on reflection, I thought it didn't look right—too vivid. The only way to “fix” it at this point was to repaint it. I started by lightly sanding with sandpaper on a small area and liked what I saw. By sanding lightly in some spots and more firmly in others, the paint was now varied, not uniform, revealing brush strokes and layers of color. To emphasize the new distressed look, I used a dry brush with a bit of black paint over the whole thing to cut the brightness back even more. I love how it turned out. Artists vary in how we work: some people faithfully execute a plan, but I'm more experimental—pot shapes and finishes evolve as I work on them.

In my work I like to use images of animals and nature that appear in our Cherokee stories. I can't help but think of these things as I work. Dragonflies have a special meaning for some people. They can represent visits from those who have passed; they can also represent change and transformation. Even the number of elements on a pot sometimes means something special to me. For example, on some turtles, I put five large scutes down the middle of the shell from his head to his tail and add four large scutes on either side of those, adding up to thirteen. These represent the thirteen lunar cycles between summers and mark the changing seasons. It takes twenty- eight days for one lunar cycle, so I add twenty- eight small scutes around the outer edge of the shell, representing those days. Stories are told corresponding to events that happen in each cycle.

What fascinates me about pottery is the way it makes you think. It's tricky sometimes to execute a two-dimensional idea onto a curved three- dimensional object. You have to think in circles, often repeating elements that might stand singly on a flat tile or painting. Not all ideas translate well. On one pot, I wanted a tree, but since a single tree would make the pot one-sided, I added three trees, which were connected to the

ground and had leaves that were intertwined. To me, the gap between the trunks of the trees formed a window. In North Carolina, there are lots of mountains, so the gap I created between the trees was almost like you were peeking through at the Carolina landscape beyond. I enjoy the challenge, from construction to decoration.

In some art shows, potters are assigned to one of two categories, traditional or contemporary, but many of us don't fall into such tidy categories. I build using the slab and coil method rather than a pottery wheel. I use commercial clay more often than I use hand-dug, hand-processed clay. I use a kiln more than I do open ground firings. I stone burnish all my pieces. While my designs are based on traditional elements, I often paint pottery after firing. Each part of the process puts me in one category or the other. I do lean more to the contemporary side. Cherokees have always used what was available to us. We have always been innovative, and whatever we had at hand we used in many ways. Over time, our resources change, and traditions evolve. In the end, what makes my piece a Cherokee pot? Me.

## **Richard Zane Smith**

Sohahiyo, enrolled tribal member of the Wyandot Nation of Kansas, Certified Indian Artist by the Indian Arts and Crafts Board

Born in 1955 and raised in Missouri, I grew up in a spiritual creative home, where artistic expression was cultivated around the coffee table in the evenings while our parents read to us. Mom always encouraged all five of us to be proud of our rich Wyandot heritage. I attended University City High School, where I was introduced to clay and enjoyed working with all kinds of natural materials. I went on to Meramec Community College, serious about arts and ceramics, and then on to Kansas City Art Institute, where I worked hard to learn as much as I could in one year, which was all I could afford.

At the end of 1977, with my truck, tools, and other possessions, I traveled and worked odd jobs out west a year before settling at a Navajo boarding school as an art teacher. I was handed a check for fifty dollars for the year for art supplies, so I soon began to make forays in the desert to find clays and other materials we could use in classes. There I was exposed to the pottery sherds of the ancient Pueblo people and first experimented with the ancient corrugated techniques, rolling fine coils of clay, that I still use today.

I met Carol there, and the following spring we were married. Since our combined income from the school was one hundred dollars a month, we lived on the road, working for the first year, never once spending a night in a motel, working as orchard irrigators, ranch hands, and camping out south of Apache Junction, Arizona, selling pots for grocery money from the hood of our truck. Eventually we settled on the Navajo Reservation in Ganado, Arizona, in 1980, where Carol taught school. It wasn't till 1983, after I entered a competition at the Heard Museum, that galleries showed an interest, and I began making pottery full time. Leaving Ganado in 1988, we settled in Glorieta, New Mexico, where we raised our family before moving to Wyandotte, Oklahoma, to be closer and more active among more traditionally minded people.

I no longer compete against other artists. I'm active in Wyandot/Wendat language and culture revitalization, our longhouse ceremonies, spent seven years teaching Wyandot language and storytelling in the Wyandotte public schools, and am continually holding pottery workshops for First Nations peoples, including Wyandot, Seneca/Cayuga, Shawnee, Oneida, and Wendat and Innu in Canada. I also enjoy telling Wyandot stories to children and passing on what I've learned, in bow making, rattle making, and other Indigenous art forms that tie us to our ancestors. I've been fortunate to be invited to New Zealand for three different Indigenous artists gatherings and cherish those inspiring gatherings alongside those of similar passion.

A dream of mine is to see all our Indigenous art traditions restored. I believe all artists are stronger when they're grounded in their own ancestral art forms first.

## **Fred Beaver**

Fred Beaver began creating Indigenous paintings by copying the designs of his wife's cousin, the well-known artist Acee Blue Eagle. At one point in his career, he sought counsel from Oscar B. Jacobson about attending art school and was told that "he was doing all right the way he was going, and he should go on."

Reflecting on his career, Beaver said that, "Whatever I did, I did by myself." His painting style was uniquely his own, and southeastern imagery was his forte. During the years he was active, few other artists were concerned with Creek and Seminole subjects. Beaver sought to accurately portray the clothing and ceremonial lives of these peoples. He paid particular attention to the careful rendering of patchwork clothing, to chickees (open-sided grass homes), and to the other details of Seminole life. He also was conscious of his ancestral Mississippian past and the cultural changes that had occurred over the past five hundred years.

## **Troy Jackson**

Being a Cherokee artist, I have a tremendous fascination with southeastern pottery. Some of my greatest influences range from artifacts found at the Spiro Mounds in Oklahoma to those found in Etowah, Georgia. One such influence is the effigy vessel. Effigy vessels are jars, bottles, and bowls made in the shape of humans, animals, and mythological figures. Some of the animals represented are fish, frogs, turtles, and birds. They are exquisite examples of the craftsmanship and engraved patterns found during the Middle Mississippian period, existing from AD 1300 to 1600. One in particular is the bird effigy bowl. It has been a favorite of mine because of the opportunity it offers to replicate the grace, elegance, and beauty of a bird. These aesthetic qualities have become very important in my work, even more so since Native American pottery has become more sculptural than utilitarian. Ideology such as this now opens the door for me to study a previous culture and compare with the existence of our culture today.

As a contemporary twenty-first-century ceramist, my greatest response to making an effigy bird bowl is the realization that I can experience a process that has been handed down for hundreds of years and develop my own style of interpretation, as did previous potters. Although bird effigy bowls' symbolism may have had a more ritualistic or ceremonial involvement with my ancestors, I now have only an admiration for their beauty as an art form.

I do, however, hold utilitarian pottery in high regard. For instance, the bird effigy bowl shown not only has the sculptural aspects of twenty-first-century pottery, it also holds the more traditional aspect of utilitarian food-safe ware. The bowl is equipped with an interior liner glaze to ensure proper food containment for the twenty-first-century consumer. It was also fired in a conventional kiln, which is capable of reaching a much higher temperature to ensure vitrification of the clay, in turn giving the bowl improved durability for functional purposes.

No matter what techniques are used, however, no matter what material and equipment is being used, southeastern pottery still represents our culture and will tell our story for years to come.

## **Wayne "Tay Sha" Earles, Caddo artist . . . still here!**

My given Caddo name is Tay Sha. It means Wolf and Friend, for the wolf guides you to the other side when you pass on, so he also is your friend. The Caddo tribes used this word to describe their friends and allies, but the Spanish heard it as Tejas, which later evolved into the state name Texas. As an Oklahoman and OU fan, I'm not sure how I feel about this; however, I do know that I want to be a friend to all Caddo by guiding them to the realization of our ancestor's artistic excellence and to instill the desire to continue this wonderful heritage.

Art has always been a part of my life. With grandfather and uncle artists, I grew to love art. At age nine, I was selling my first art. It was a colored pencil buffalo drawing. My art interest continued with high school art and university art classes, as well as photography. In addition, I had an unexplored interest in stone. I grew up near

Cedar Lake collecting arrowheads and various rocks. I also explored the red rock canyons, wondering if I could carve something from the sandstone. It was not until later in life, and after much thought, that I chose stone as my art medium. I received encouragement from my sons, who worked in pottery, painting, and graphic design, revealing the beautiful ancient Caddo designs as well as their own contemporary continuation of this art. My work consists of two lines of stonework art—cultural stonework and contemporary stone jewelry with traditional engraving inspired by ancient Caddo/Spiro designs. My cultural stonework is an artistic version that honors those ancient Caddo lithic (stone) artifacts mostly found at Spiro Mounds. They include monolithic axes, ceremonial maces, batons, stone effigies, chunky stones, and bannerstones. As I create these objects, using current hand tools such as saws, rasps, files, and sandpaper, my appreciation grows for the time, effort, and amazing results that our ancestors achieved. They had only stone tools to work the hard stone, not the soft stone I use— soapstone, pipestone, and alabaster. My contemporary stone jewelry consists of pendant and gorget necklaces with engraving celebrating the beautiful and intricate ancient Caddo/Spiro pottery designs, as well as some shell and various stonework artifact designs.

Besides providing a way to express my art, I hope that my stonework might catch the interest, and realization, of Caddo youth as to how very special, intricate, and beautifully artistic their own ancient Caddo stonework, pottery, and shell artifacts are. Inspiring them to pursue the continuation of some type of Caddo art. That would be a dream come true.

## **Mike Larsen**

Among Native peoples in the Americas, the eagle has, since ancient times, been a symbol of power and strength. Men would seek to gather that strength into themselves through ceremonies like the sun dances.

Eagles were a large influence among Plains tribes, but they were just as important with the Eastern Woodlands people where my heritage lies. When we see one hovering over a ceremony, it carries us back to a much simpler time, as a guide and spiritual messenger, as we remember the teachings of our elders and sing the songs from long ago in a language we refuse to forget.

This painting is simple. A man enfolds himself into the very presence of this magnificent creature, willing to accept whatever blessing it may offer, willing to carry out whatever task it might direct.

At a time in our distant past, deep in the Southwest, our people began their migration toward the east, leaving evidence of their being at Spiro and many areas along the mighty Mississippi. The Mississippian culture lasted more generations than we can count. There is much evidence of the Thunderbird, the eagle, motifs left at the Spiro Mounds, and interestingly, much farther west on pottery. These designs would continue for hundreds of years.

Our artisans today continue the tradition and portray the eagle often in artwork and dance. Among the full bloods, the need for that connection remains strong. Our young men still long for the old days when they look into the sky and watch an eagle in the distance. Some still seek its protection during the “little war,” traditional stickball.

When we visited Winterville and Grand Village, it was impossible to comprehend the enormous effort in building the mounds during the Mississippian time. Those peoples relied, I’m sure, on their spiritual brothers the jaguar and, of course . . . the eagle.

## **T. C. Cannon**

T. C. Cannon (Pai- doun- u- day, or One Who Stands in the Sun) showed a talent for drawing and writing at an early age, winning numerous awards as a teenager. Following high school, he attended the Institute of American Indian Artist in Santa Fe, New Mexico. After two years in Santa Fe, he moved to San Francisco before enlisting in the US Army and serving in the 101st Airborne. For his actions in battle during the Vietnam War,

Cannon was awarded two Bronze Stars and the Cross of Gallantry from the Vietnamese government

Entering the army at a time when his peers were protesting the war in Vietnam shows Cannon's connection to the warrior traditions of Caddo and Kiowa ancestors. His painting *His Hair Flows Like a River* is reflective of his cultural legacy and is reminiscent of headdresses worn by medicine leaders, hunters, and warriors going back to the Hopewell period (BC 300 – AD 900), Mississippian period (ad 900–1650), and into the late nineteenth century.

### **Chase Kahwinhut Earles**

Traditionally Caddo pottery was made by hand, using locally available materials. The completed vessel was wood fired in a pit (not a kiln) at relatively low temperatures. Before the clay was modeled into its resulting shape, it was tempered with natural additives (local river mussels, sand, or animal bone) to keep it from shrinking and cracking during the drying and firing process. Once the vessel is allowed to dry to what potters call the greenware stage, it is burnished by wetting areas of the outer surface and rubbing the exterior with a smooth river stone. Then, using an awl, the artist carves scrolls and other traditional designs into the ceramic.

This particular tripod vessel was typically much smaller and primarily used as a musical instrument or rattle. Small pieces of fired clay were fired inside the feet that would act as the rattles when shook. In all probability it was used during ceremonies.

"My contemporary Caddo pottery is born of inspiration from my Native tribe's ancient and unique heritage. It is their legacy that I wish to keep alive by interpreting our ancient designs and symbols in a new and modern way using the methods and materials of our time."

### **Woodrow Wilson "Woody" Crumbo**

Woodrow Wilson "Woody" Crumbo was born in Lexington, Oklahoma. He was well acquainted with the Kiowa Six, and through their encouragement, he enrolled at the University of Oklahoma in 1936 and studied there for two years.

During the late 1930s, he learned mural painting techniques in the Indian Art Center program at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. He was one of six Indian artists commissioned to paint murals in the newly constructed US Department of Interior building in Washington, DC, in 1939–40. During this time he also served as director of the Art Department at Bacone College, a position he held for three years (1938–41).

Culture was important to Crumbo. His artwork, including this turban, is reflective of the traditions of his own tribe as well as others, whom he grouped with the southern plains. According to Crumbo, "I have always painted with the desire of developing Indian art. . . I am attempting to record Indian customs and legends now, while they are alive, to make them a part of the great American culture before these, too, become lost, only to be fragmentarily pieced together by fact and supposition."

### **Starr Hardridge**

I spent my formative years in Oklahoma, outside the Creek Nation. My earliest art influence came from my family's Native art collection. I was particularly drawn to the Kiowa/ Comanche flat painters in southern Oklahoma. While I was attending college in Georgia, I had the opportunity to explore Okmulgee and Etowah National Parks. Intrigued by the structures and historical connection to the Muscogee people, I began to research Mississippian art and Creek history and culture. For the next twenty years, I maintained a life on the East Coast as a commercial and decorative artist. I also traveled and studied art throughout Europe.

During this period my endeavors in painting were shaped by European ideals of realism and classical rendering techniques. I had no connection to a lot of the subject matter that I was painting and still searched for my voice as an artist. My father passed away, and this sense of loss added to the disconnection I was feeling by my own



self-imposed exile in the Northeast. This would ultimately inspire me to change my style completely. While researching material for a group show structured around themes of removal and resistance (Trail of Tears), I considered what my ancestors had lost and also what they had retained. Language and ceremonial traditions still persist to this day. Traditional Southeastern Woodland beadwork was affected and for a time, until a recent revival, had died out among the Creek people. I was able to see these “artifacts” only in the museums back east. I immediately became intrigued by the forms I was seeing in the southeastern bandolier bag. The beadwork designs were very different from the beadwork I had seen in southern Oklahoma. The Muscogee designs were organic, nonsymmetrical, with brilliant color. This discovery of beadwork from the late 1700s to the early 1800s became my focus. I settled on pointillism as the best way to weave a contemporary narrative. My aim was not to imitate beadwork but to convey something that reached beyond conventional narrative painting. I developed a new visual language for myself that combined European education with cultural heritage. Pointillism had become a vehicle to express my own Native aesthetic.

My process is both meditative and cathartic. With every piece I feel I am on a walkabout, finding connections to Indigenous art around the world. I sought to take the paint out of its common context and give it a form that people want touch, to feel. This is what makes my work different. I have my color and style. It is not exactly traditional. It is not European or Indigenous either but both at the same time. My art journey has allowed me to connect with elders and traditional people in my tribe to better understand my heritage. It has led me back to family that had been estranged for decades. Making these connections and relationships that I felt removed from has helped to heal a certain amount of generational trauma and loss. The process of creating art gives me perspective to reflect on where I stand on the timeline and gives me a platform to express my own Native contemporary voice.

## **Martha Berry**

River of Art required more than three hundred hours to create. The bandolier bag is an homage to our ancestors who created Cherokee art. The designs used are borrowed from the pottery found in the mounds throughout the southeastern part of the United States. Those potters were the ancestors of the tribes of the Southeast, including the Cherokee. The strap is beaded in designs I have used to represent water, the flow of a river. The right strap was also done in the design of a DNA double helix. The fully beaded flap design is an exaggerated sun circle, representing the sun, which gives us life and warmth and peace.

The bag represents the never-ending river of art that is Cherokee culture. No art is new. All of us create work that is greatly influenced by those artists who came before us. In turn, we will influence all those Cherokee artists who come after. Just as the rain adds to the river, our work adds to the great stream of Cherokee art. Our work is special because it is a part of that flow. The river flows always, no beginning, no end. We are the rain that makes the river; the river is the vehicle that takes us on forever.

## **Margaret Roach Wheeler**

In 2008, I was contacted by Lona Barrick of the Chickasaw Nation to meet Jerod Tate, a nationally known Chickasaw classical composer. We were to discuss a production they were planning. I was commissioned to create the costumes and set design for *Lowak Shoppala’*, *Fire and Light*, a work that expresses Chickasaw identity through the medium of modern classical music and theater. Linda Hogan, a Chickasaw author and Pulitzer Prize finalist, composed poetry and narration for the production. I was given the challenge of creating one thousand years of Chickasaw garments.

The two handwoven garments in this exhibit are from the Clans scene of *Lowak Shoppala’*. In designing the costumes, I was able to use my research on the Mississippian period from a fellowship at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian. The Mississippians were ancestors of the Chickasaws.

I photographed and sketched conch shell engravings that depicted men in breechcloths, arm bands, leg bands, capes, and headdresses. These images were the inspiration for the Minko costume, the Minko being a leader



in the Mississippian culture. The breechcloth features a double-headed woodpecker. The woodpecker is a warrior motif. It symbolizes the strength, courage, and determination of the Mississippian and Chickasaw people.

I had also photographed a piece of fabric from Spiro Mounds that was at the Smithsonian's American History Museum. I thought the design woven into the fabric resembled an eye. I used that piece to create a design woven into the back of my Minko's cape.

The Panther Woman costume was inspired by a John White painting from 1585. John White (1548–1593, colonist and artist) painted an Indian woman of Florida. Through research I believe her garment is woven of Spanish moss. The British Museum has this painting, and I was able to view it while doing research at the museum.

The Panther Clan people knew how to make use of terror inspired by the name of their totem animal. They often slept during the day and hunted at night. I designed the garment from White's painting, raising the handwoven yoke for our modern modesty, leaving the warp long and twisting it to mimic the Spanish Moss. The underdress was fashioned from deer hides. The headdress is created with shells and feathers, a common resource for art among the coastal tribes.

Bringing together my heritage, research, and weaving skills in these costumes was one of the special highlights of my creative life.

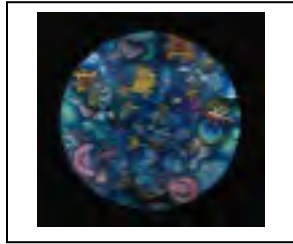
## **Erin Shaw**

My name is Erin Shaw. I am a citizen of the Chickasaw nation. My work as an artist rests in this simple assertion: We are collectors of stories, and the stories we collect shape the people we become. In narrative style, I create paintings engaged in story: both its function and its telling. I see my role in this process as mediator and disrupter: standing between two opposing things, placing boundaries in new and unusual places, and joining them once again. I work in this manner that I might see things in a new way.

Everything Belongs defines my art practice over the last decade. This painting is the out-ward visualization of my inner life. For much of my life, I have sought to make sense of what felt like opposing forces shaping me. I have experienced tension in being a Chickasaw woman, connected to and led by my ancestors while living in a twenty-first-century Western world. Everything Belongs represents my coming to peace with the fact that all the parts of my life are important; every story, experience, and person has shaped me. I cannot nor should not wish away certain aspects of my story; there is room for all of them. Everything Belongs.

Over the span of the last ten years, I have created a visual lexicon of symbols. This visual lexicon comprises representative fragments of stories that have been vital in my life. Within this painting there are images from stories created with my son, ancient images from my Mississippian ancestors, ancient images from my European ancestors, and images from family stories. All of them together tell the story of who I am. And I know that Everything Belongs.

## Cultural Continuation Object Labels



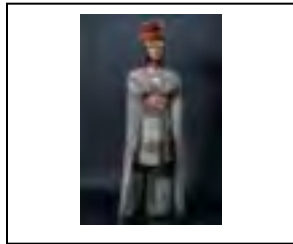
*EVERYTHING BELONGS*, by Erin Shaw

Chickasaw

2013

Mixed Media

National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, 2017.08



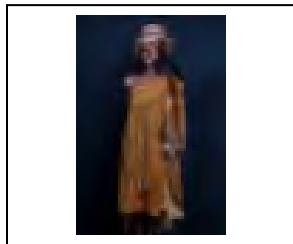
*MINKO OUTFIT*, by Margaret Roah Wheeler

Chickasaw

2017

Mixed Media with handwoven and loomed textiles

Chickasaw Nation Collection, 2018.037.0007a-b.



*PANTHER CLAN*, by Margaret Roah Wheeler

Chickasaw

2017

Mixed Media with handwoven and hand-sewn textiles

Chickasaw Nation Collection, 2018.037.0001a-b.



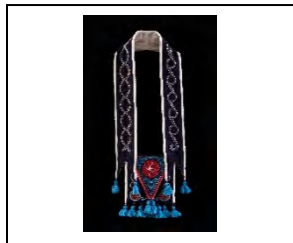
*SPIDER VESSEL*, by Joel Queen

Eastern Band Cherokee

2007

Ceramic

National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, 2007.26.1



*RIVER OF ART*, by Marth Berry

Cherokee

2013

Wool stroud cloth, European glass beads, linen, silk ribbon

National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, 2016.3



*BEADED BANDOLIER BAG*, by Damion Jay McGirt  
Muscogee  
1998  
Wool stroud cloth, European glass beads  
National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, 1998.53



*SPIRO*, by Dan Townsend  
Muscogee  
2017  
Marine shell  
National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, 2017.13



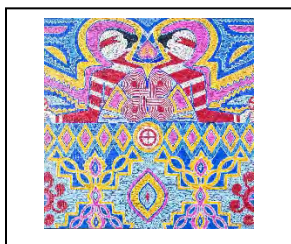
*SPIRO*, by Dan Townsend  
Muscogee  
2017  
Marine shell  
Collection of Dr. F. Kent Reilly, III



*CADDO VESSEL*, by Jeri Redcorn  
Caddo  
2003  
Ceramic  
Collection of Dr. F. Kent Reilly, III



*SAH COOH (SUN'S PATH)*, by Jeri Redcorn  
Caddo  
2020  
Ceramic  
National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, 2020



*COSMIC TWINS*, by Starr Hardridge  
Muscogee  
2016  
Acrylic and plaster on canvas  
National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, 2019.17



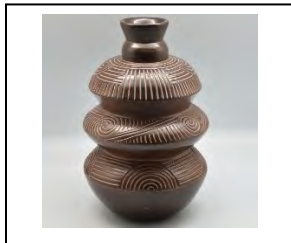
*OTTER TURBAN*, by Woody Crumbo  
Potawatomi  
Ca. 1940  
Otter fur, silver, silk  
Charles W. Hogan Collection, gift of Miriam S. Hogan  
National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, 2000.37.096



*FRIENDSHIP BLANKET*, by Anita Fields  
Osage  
2000  
Stroud cloth, silk  
National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, 2000.27



*INCISED JAR WITH FOUR STORY PANELS: CORN, HUMMINGBIRD, HAND WITH CIRCLES, AND SPIDER*, by Joel Queen  
Eastern Band Cherokee  
2006  
Ceramic  
Museum of the Red River, 07.8.1



*THREE-TIER COMPOUND BOTTLE WITH INCISED DESIGN*, by Scott Roberts  
Muscogee  
2010  
Ceramic  
Museum of the Red River, 11.17.1



*DOUBLE-WALLED BASKET WITH EYE DAZZLER PATTERN*, by Jessica Thomas  
Choctaw  
Ca. 1995  
Rivercane  
Museum of the Red River, 15.28.4



*BASKETRY MAT*, by Mary E. Smith  
Muscogee  
2010  
Commercial cane  
Museum of the Red River, 13.6.1



*BASKET TRAY WITH "DOUBLE DUCK" PATTERN, by Claude Medford Jr.*

Choctaw  
1983  
Rivercane  
Museum of the Red River, 90.1.14



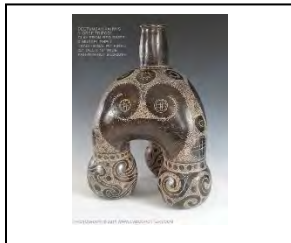
*DOUBLE-WALLED LIDDED BASKET, by Eva Wolf*

Cherokee  
Ca. 1970  
Rivercane  
Museum of the Red River, 17.39.13 a-b



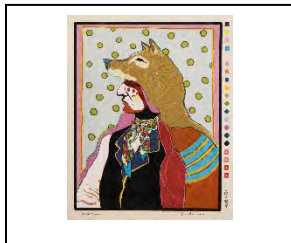
*BASKET, by Unknown Artist*

Cherokee  
1980  
Rivercane  
Museum of the Red River, 16.35.54



*HORSE TRIPOD VESSEL (DEE'-TUMBAH KAH'-WIS), by Chase Kahwinhut Earles*

Caddo  
2015  
Ceramic  
National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, 2018.12



*HIS HAIR FLOWS LIKE A RIVER, by T.C. Cannon*

Caddo/Kiowa  
1978  
Woodblock print  
The Arthur and Shifra Silberman Collection  
National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, 1996.27.0312



*CLOAK OF THE EAGLE, by Mike Larsen*

Chickasaw  
1992  
Oil on canvas  
National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, 2017.02



*CEREMONIAL MACE (TAH'-NAH-HA—BUFFALO)*, by Wayne Earles

Caddo

2018

Stone

National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, 2019.34.1



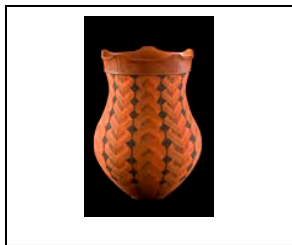
*BIRD EFFIGY BOWL*, by Troy Jackson

Cherokee

2018

Ceramic

National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, 2020.1



*WYANDOT REEMERGENCE*, by Richard Zane Smith

Wyandot

2008

Ceramic

National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, 2008.20



*UNTITLED DRAWINGS (CULTURAL LEGACY)*, by Fred Beaver

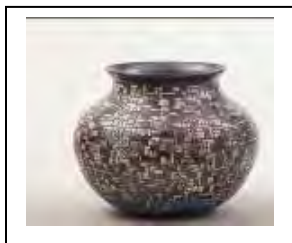
Muscogee/Seminole

Ca. 1975

Drawing on paper

The Arthur and Shifra Silberman Collection

National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, 1996.27.0179



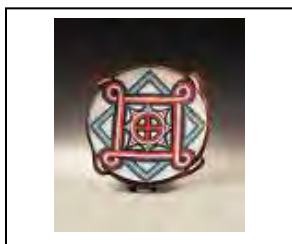
*DRAGON FLY POT*, by Karin Walkingstick

Cherokee

2016

Ceramic

National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, 2019.30



*EVERLASTING FIRE PLATE*, by Chase Earles and Starr Hardridge

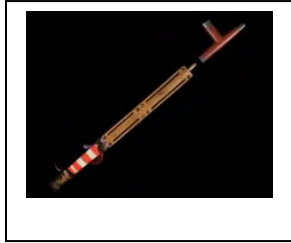
Caddo and Muscogee

2019

Acrylic and Plaster on Ceramic

National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, 2019.35

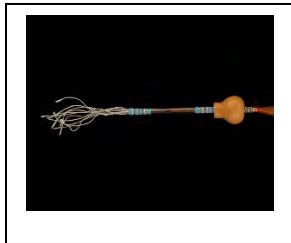




*PIPE BOWL AND STEM*, by Unknown Artist  
Lakota, Hunkpapa  
19<sup>th</sup> Century  
Wood, catlinite, quills  
National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum



*BASKET*, by Claude Medford Jr.  
Choctaw  
1985  
Reeds  
The Arthur and Shifra Silberman Collection  
National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, 1996.27.0648



*PEYOTE RATTLE*, by Unknown artist  
Kiowa  
Ca. 1970  
Beads, wood, gourd, feathers  
The Arthur and Shifra Silberman Collection  
National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, 1996.27.1324



*SPIDER GOURD*, by Karen Berry  
Cherokee  
2019  
Gourd and pigment  
National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, 2020.12.1



*TURTLE NECKLACE*, by Karen Berry  
Cherokee  
2019  
Gourd, textile, pigment  
National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, 2020.12.2

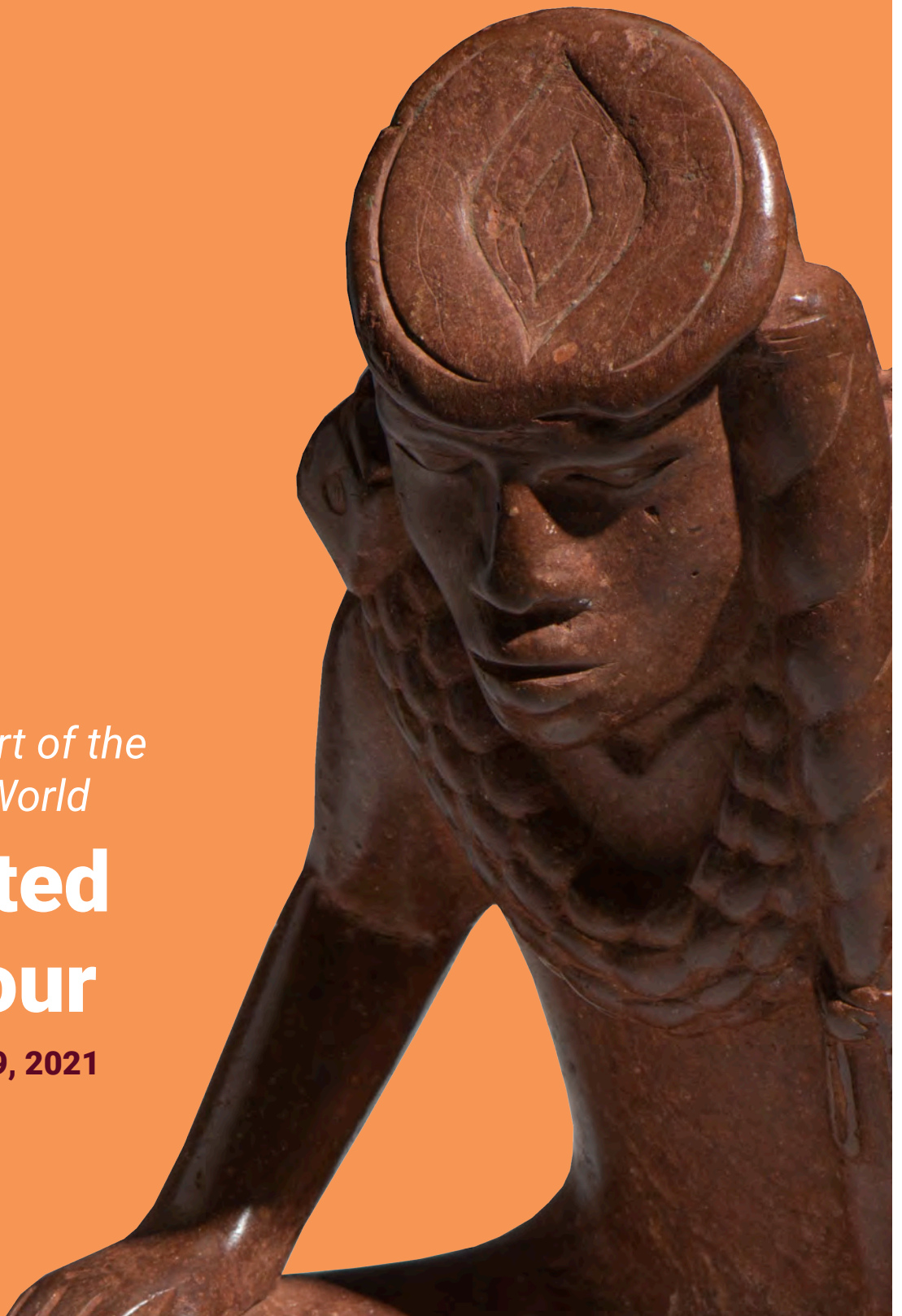


*MONOLITHIC AXE (P-I-TA-U-NI-WAN'-HA—TO HAVE POWER)*, by Wayne Earles  
Caddo  
2018  
Stone  
National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, 2019.34.2

*Spiro and the Art of the  
Mississippian World*

# **Suggested Adult Tour**

**February 12 – May 9, 2021**



# **Spiro and the Art of The Mississippian World**

## **Adult Tour**

### **Introduction**

5 min.

#### **Theme**

Spiro is one of the most culturally important sites in the United States.

#### **Question(s)**

What historic sites have you visited? What compelled you to visit? Do historic sites need protection? What are some reasons to protect a historic site?

#### **Context**

This 45-minute tour provides an overview of *Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World*. This is not an in-depth tour, but an effort to encourage guests to learn more.

#### **Engage**

Welcome guests to the Museum, introduce yourself, share what will happen, where you are going and how long it will take. Ask introductory questions to gain an initial understanding of their experience with historic sites and preservation. Share that this tour will be more of a conversation, rather than a one-sided presentation. State your theme.

### **The Mississippian World**

7 min.

#### **Subtheme**

The Mississippian people were a group of stable and prosperous cultures in the Midwest and Southeast.

#### **Question(s)**

Who are the Mississippian people? How would you describe daily life? How were they tied to their environment? How did trade impact society? What represents stability and prosperity?

#### **Context**

The Mississippian people (900-1650 AD) built large stockade towns with monumental earthen mounds and broad plazas. These towns became the focus of Native American political, social and ceremonial life during this period. Political life was based on ranked societies headed by chiefs associated with divine attributes by their people. These chiefs and their immediate relatives controlled political power. Flood-plain agriculture and the harvesting of local flora and fauna served as the economic basis for most Mississippian centers. Corn (or maize) often dominated crops. Other plants, whether grown or gathered, such as beans, squash, sumpweed, acorns and sunflowers played an important role. Hunting and fishing supplemented this plant-based diet. Each Mississippian center produced distinctive art. In some instances, trade caused the exchange of art with other centers. Stylistic regions subdivided the overall geographic area of the Mississippian world. Despite these stylistic

divisions, there existed a unity of themes, shared by geographically dispersed centers, because of similar religious beliefs, ritual activities, mythic narratives and cosmology, which often relied upon common artistic expressions of specific symbols.

## Engage

The major elements of culture include symbols, language, cultural and religious norms, values and artifacts. Select an object to use as an example. Connect it to these cultural elements, then challenge guests to do the same with other objects. Ask them to share their findings. Discuss how these elements represent the Mississippian people, along with their meaning and/or significance.

## Transition

### What more is needed to gain a full or better understanding of a particular site/culture?

## Spiro: Site & Ceremony 7 min.

### Subtheme

The quantity, quality and diversity of cultural objects found at Spiro are staggering.

### Question(s)

Why is Spiro so unique?

### Context

In many ways, Spiro is physically unremarkable compared to other North American and Mississippian sites. It is not the largest Mississippian center ever discovered and it did not have the biggest population. What made it unique was that it contained the largest assemblage of engraved, embossed and carved objects of any known Mississippian site. According to James A. Brown, author of *Pre-Columbian Shell Engravings from the Craig Mound at Spiro, Oklahoma*, ninety percent of all known Mississippian engraved shell and ritual artifacts come from this single site (Galloway, 1989). This matchless assemblage mystified scholars since the 1930s, when the site's discovery led many to speculate that its origins lay in Central Mexico or with a mythical lost civilization. Today, we know that these ideas are false. The objects' production and remarkable craftsmanship were realized by the ancestors of today's Caddo, Wichita, Pawnee, Osage, Lakota, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Muscogee, and countless other Native communities as demonstrated by archaeological and ethnographic records.

## Engage

Focus guest attention on a specific example (i.e., the spider motif or cross). Reiterate how these objects represent culture and identity. Explore the exhibition and ask guests to compare objects:

- How are these similar?
- How are they different?

*Note that Mississippian centers varied in language, architecture, art and ritual artifacts. Those similarities and differences are reflected here because Spiro may have served as a sacred site or significant ritual center.*

## Transition

**Ask guests to think about how our lives and cultures would be perceived based only upon our possessions. Would they tell the entire story of who we are and what we believe?**

## Spiro: Site & Ceremony 7 min.

### Subtheme

Experts believe Spiro ceremonial leaders tried to restart time and reverse the effects of climate change.

### Questions

Why did the Mississippian people bring and bury their most sacred ceremonial and religious objects at Spiro? What impact did the “Little Ice Age” have on the Spiroan people?

### Context

Recent archaeological and iconographic analyses confirm that while objects came to Spiro at various stages in the site’s development, the vast majority of imported objects appear to have been brought there around 1400 AD. This date corresponds to the construction of an architectural hollow chamber or “Spirit Lodge” that was built inside an earthen structure known as Craig Mound. According to archaeologist George Sabo III, it is possible that the Spirit Lodge may have been constructed in response to the effects of climate change brought on by a “Little Ice Age.” The chamber became the ritualistic vessel that Spiroan spiritual leaders built in order to store their world’s most sacred objects – including flint-clay statues and effigy pipes, engraved shell cups, sacred regalia, repoussé copper plates, ornamented fabrics, double-weave baskets, and other pieces from distant regions. For example, there were baskets in the hollow chamber that contained shell beads from the Sea of Cortez (present day Gulf of California located over 1,100 miles away) and a large piece of obsidian from the Valley of Mexico (present day Mexico City located over 1,300 miles away). Similar to the historic Ghost Dance movement of the late 19th century, and other spiritual revitalization efforts, it is believed that by creating the Spirit Lodge, Spiro’s ceremonial leaders were attempting to restart time and ritualistically reverse the effects of climate change. This possible scenario is what makes the ceremonial site of Spiro so distinctive from other Mississippian centers.

### Engage

Focus guest attention on a specific example (i.e., a gorget with the spider or hand motif) and brainstorm why Spiroan and Mississippian peoples brought and buried their most sacred ceremonial and religious

goods at Spiro. Connect the “Little Ice Age” they experienced with the environmental changes taking place now. Ask:

- What event would make you want to restart time?
- What would you do to stop drought and wildfires in the West, hurricanes and flooding in the South and East, as well as tornadoes throughout the central part of the United States?

*Note that any answer would be based upon a belief or principle they understood to be true. Likewise, the Mississippian people sent all these artifacts to one place because of a shared belief it would change the climate.*

## Transition

**Help guests to consider a prized possession they might donate to turn back time.**

## Archeology and Looting 7 min.

### Subtheme

Looting devastated Spiro and left Archeology to pick up the pieces.

### Questions

What impact does looting and archeology have on society? How do we best preserve the past? What does it mean when a site is “protected?” Who protects it? Who has the right to control the past?

### Context

Both looting and New Deal/Works Progress Administration (WPA) archaeological excavations came together in a near-perfect storm at Spiro. In 1935, the public’s imagination peaked when the Kansas City Star called the site’s discovery a “King Tut’s Tomb in the Arkansas Valley,” and identified it as the greatest source of Mississippian iconographic material ever found. First identified in 1914 by Joseph Thoburn, the site was owned by Choctaw and Chickasaw Freedmen who initially prohibited digging on the land. By 1933, that prohibition changed. The families, perhaps feeling the Great Depression’s effect, relented to the repeated requests to excavate their property; and leased part of the site to a group of commercial diggers calling themselves the Pocola Mining Company. What complicated the situation is the manner it was first excavated. Not concerned with historic preservation, the mining company dug with reckless abandon—applying no methodology or record keeping. The goal was simple: extract the material inside. To accomplish this, the workers tunneled horizontally and soon discovered a hollow chamber, now described as a “Spirit Lodge” by scholars that contained thousands of painted, engraved, and embossed objects laid out in a ritualistic manner similar to a historic Arikara temple (Gilmore, 1930). Moving swiftly, the workers grabbed all the ancient relics they could sell and tossed the textiles, pot sherds, broken shell, and cedar elements onto the ground.

Looters sold what they considered valuable on-site, out of the trunks of cars and through relic magazines. Quickly, this material dispersed



into private hands across the world and the loss was incalculable. This singular site, which held the keys to understanding Mississippian iconography, religion, ceremony, and countless other social, political, and trade practices, will now always remain a partial mystery as there is no way to reassemble all the items that were sold or to place them in their correct context within the mound.

Owing to the renewed interest in archaeology brought about by the New Deal, Oklahoma stopped the commercial digging at Spiro. In November of 1935, the state government passed legislation requiring a license for all excavations in the state, and placed control of the site in the hands of semi-experienced archaeologists at the University of Oklahoma. Employees of the Pocola Mining Company, angered that they were denied a lease to dig, dynamited the mound. No amount of legislation could repair the destruction. The looters left and only devastation remained. WPA-sponsored excavations began in 1936 and continued until 1941 to uncover what little remained of the mound's contents.

For years, Native American burial sites went without protection until the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (NAGPRA). It governs the treatment of Indian remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony by imposing certain requirements when such objects are excavated, and by specifying when objects that are in museum or agency collections must be repatriated to descendant tribes and individuals. NAGPRA seeks to recognize indigenous human rights, which are inherent rights of all peoples that command international support and recognition.

Although NAGPRA represents an important recognition of indigenous cultural rights, the statute provides only limited protection for Native American interests in preventing desecration of ancestral sites. The objects may ultimately be repatriated to the tribe under NAGPRA, but they may still be unearthed and the subject of scientific testing before being returned to the tribe. Both activities constitute desecration under the belief systems of many indigenous peoples.

## Engage

Ask guests to identify criteria they would use to determine whether a historic site should be protected.

- Does Spiro meet their criteria?
- Why or why not?

Explain that at the state, national and international levels, there are laws and organizations in place to protect significant historic, cultural and natural sites. In the United States, the National Park Service designates some sites as National Historic Landmarks (NHL) and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) works at an international level to designate and promote the protection of globally important sites. Take a few moments to explore the impact of looting and archeology at Spiro.

Before moving on, acknowledge there is another perspective – the

indigenous rights perspective. Even though laws are in place, many do not go far enough to protect these sites according to Native communities. Describe the importance of the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act of 1990 and its limitations. Share how critical issues arise when we consider who has the right to control the past. Discuss whether guests consider the material remains of past cultures a “common good” that is privately owned, a “public resource” for academics in the nation-state where they are found, or a “cultural resource” that belongs to the descended contemporary indigenous communities.

## Transition

**Contemplate with guests how they would want future generations to treat their site.**

## Cultural Continuation 7 min.

### Subtheme

The artistic heritage and cultural traditions of native people reinforces our country’s greatest strength—its diversity.

### Question(s)

Who are the modern descendants of the Mississippian people? Why is it important to understand and acknowledge the cultural legacy of Native Americans?

### Context

Between the 16th and 19th centuries, little effort was made to assess pre-Columbian architecture and material culture across North America. Instead, romanticized versions of a mythical past were presented as fact. The lack of acceptance of a Native American role led to speculation that European, Mediterranean, or Asian people created the mounds. Many Americans believed such skilled engineers and artists could only have come from the “Old World.” It was unfathomable to them that Native Americans could accomplish such feats. This belief, rooted in racism, fostered a desire to strip Native people of their land, culture, and past (Brose, 5). In the late 1800s, the United States government finally acknowledged the true builders of the vast ceremonial centers in the Midwest and Southeast. Because of these past biases, it is even more critical that we talk about Native peoples’ legacy and connect it to present-day communities in the United States. Highlighting diversity facilitates the introduction of new ideas and perspectives and bridges cultural differences in a nation composed of people from across the globe. Moreover, by presenting both Native American and scholarly views about the Mississippian world, this project connects contemporary Native American communities with their ancestral past. It helps non-Native visitors understand the ancient peoples who once occupied lands in this country’s Midwest and Southeast.

## Engage

Explain the difference between extinct and extant. Extant is the opposite of extinct. It refers to things that are presently living – they have not disappeared or been destroyed. Discuss how an extant culture becomes extinct. Ask for ways we can stop it from happening. Challenge guests to determine how the objects in this section of the exhibition relate to those previously seen. Connect their answers to the role of museums. Museums collect, present and share art and artifacts to keep stories, traditions and cultures alive. They strive to learn from the past to value the present and save it for the future.

## Conclusion 5 min.

## Theme

Spiro is one of the most culturally important sites in the United States.

## Engage

Be sure to repeat your theme statement and conclude by thanking everyone for joining. Offer suggestions for continuing activities (i.e. a Call to Action) as they relate to your museum. Let guests know you will stay for a few more minutes to answer any final questions they may have.

## Call to Action Example

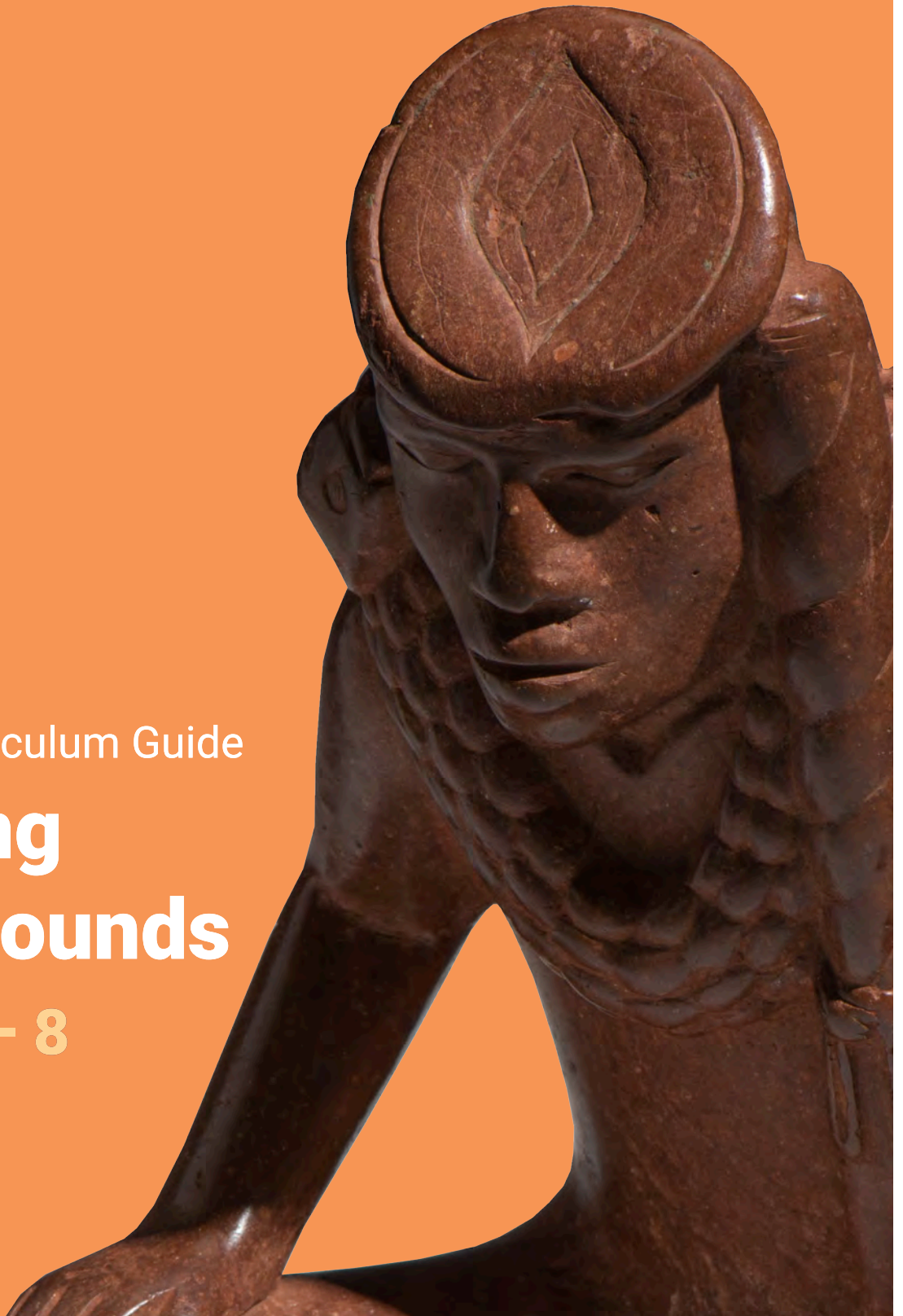
## Invite guests

to continue learning more about the Mississippian people by suggesting an upcoming Spiro-related program or by visiting the Museum Store to purchase the new book *Recovering Ancient Spiro: Native American Art, Ritual, and Cosmic Renewal*.

Exhibition Curriculum Guide

# Exploring Spiro Mounds

Grades 3 – 8



## Essential Question:

### What made Spiro Mounds so unique?

The mounds at Spiro, Oklahoma, are among the most important archaeological remains in the United States. A remarkable assemblage of artifacts from the mounds shows that pre-historic Spiro people created a sophisticated culture which influenced the entire Southeast. There was an extensive trade network, a highly developed religious center, and a political system which controlled the region. Located on a bend of the Arkansas River, the site was a natural gateway between societies to the east and the west, a gateway at which Spiro people exerted their influence. Yet much of the Spiro Culture is still a mystery, including the reason for the decline and abandonment.

## Oklahoma Academic Standards:

### Social Studies Content

- 3.2.2 A.** Describe how early American Indians used Oklahoma’s natural resources, such as bison hunting, fur trading, and farming.
- 3.3.3** Describe American Indian pre-contact cultures that have inhabited what is now Oklahoma, such as the Spiro Mound Builders.
- 4.2.3 B.** Explain how and why regions change over time by comparing regions in the past with life in the same regions in the present.
- 4.3.2 B.** Explain how the characteristics of culture affect the ways in which people live.
- 4.4.1 A.** Explain how humans depend upon the physical environment for food, shelter, and economic activities.
- 6.3.2** Identify and describe cultural traits of language, ethnic heritage, religion, and traditions practiced among peoples.
- 6.4.3** Analyze the impact of climate and natural disaster on human populations, including forced migration, scarcity of consumer goods, economic activities, and loss of life.

## Lesson Procedures

### Pre-Visit Activities

**Engage:** Share the following text with the students. Read aloud, or, depending on grade level, students may take turns reading aloud.

When European explorers first set foot on the shores of North America, they had no concept of what awaited them. The remarkable cultures they encountered were unlike any other found in Europe, Africa, or Asia. Yet, only a few were able to gaze on the grandeur of these once great cities and people. Had these voyagers arrived two hundred years sooner, the towns and communities dotting the landscape would have looked starkly different. Vast ceremonial complexes spread across the eastern half of the continent. Surrounded by tall palisaded walls, the largest of these centers comprised dozens, and in one case hundreds, of large earthen mounds, expansive plazas, and massive temples. One of the few Europeans who saw these Mississippian cities was Hernando de Soto. Venturing into the southeastern landscape in 1539, members of his expedition documented the communities they encountered in their search for gold. The largest was called Coosa. Their journey to this city was recorded and later described in a modern geographic context by Garrick Bailey: “They marched for six

days through dependent villages before nearing the capital itself. The dependent chiefdoms and villages of Coosa stretched for four hundred miles. . .from eastern Tennessee, through Northwest Georgia to the Coosa and Alabama Rivers in Central Alabama.” Another large city, referred to as Talomeco, is referenced as having an enormous temple at its center, “more than a hundred paces long and forty wide. . . . [N]ear the doors were twelve giant figures carved from wood, such faithful imitations of life, . . . had they been in the most famous temples of Rome . . . they would have been esteemed and valued for their grandeur and perfection.” Sadly, these conquistadors were the last to see many of these communities. De Soto and his men were on an expedition of conquest, not exploration. In their quest to find cities of wealth and opulence, similar to that of the Inca and Aztec, they left behind only destruction and disease—devastating the last of these once great communities.

—Excerpt from *Recovering Ancient Spiro: Native American Art, Ritual, and Cosmic Renewal* Edited by Eric D. Singleton and F. Kent Reilly III

### **Explain: Divide students into groups of two or three. Hand out one Object Card per group from Handout A.**

- Explain that each group has a photo of an object that was found at Spiro Mounds. Ask students to think about what the object is and what its use might have been. Have them discuss in the small groups then present their ideas to the class.
- As the groups make their presentations, introduce the vocabulary words and definitions in Handout B. Explain that these words define some of the objects found in the mounds. Ask if any group thinks their object is one of these words?
- Explain that they will have an opportunity to see the objects in person or online and learn more about them at the National Cowboy Museum exhibition *Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World*.

### **During Museum Visit**

- Give each student a copy of the Exploring Spiro Mounds Museum Activity Sheet with their object (Handout C) which was studied previously in the classroom, a clipboard and pencil. Go over the directions for filling out the sheet.
- During the tour of *Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World*, have each student find the object they worked with previously and record some new information about that object. Before starting the tour, have each student select another object to study; that object will be drawn on the bottom half of the activity sheet. Additionally, the student is to write a sentence or two about why they thought it was interesting.
- Collect the Exploring Spiro Mounds Museum Activity Handouts at the end of the activity.

### **Post-Visit Activities**

- Return the Exploring Spiro Mounds Museum Activity Sheets and have students meet in their previous groups. Use these sheets to share the new information about the objects they were studying. Have the groups report on the new information to the class. Display the vocabulary words and encourage students to use them, when applicable.
- Encourage students to share their drawing with a partner and discuss any distinctive features.
- Have a large group discussion on the **Essential Question: What made Spiro Mounds so unique?**





# Handout A

Print and cut out each Object Card for  
Pre-Visit Group Activity.

1.



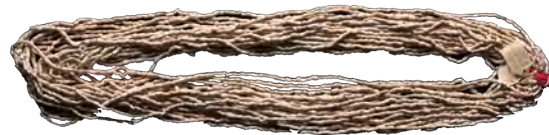
2.



3.



4.





# Handout A

Print and cut out each Object Card for  
Pre-Visit Group Activity.

5.



6.



7.



8.





# Handout A

Print and cut out each Object Card for  
Pre-Visit Group Activity.

9.



10.



11.



12.







# Handout A

## Identification for Object Cards

1. Human head effigy plate. Le Flore County, Oklahoma, Spiro site, AD 1200–1450. Copper. Courtesy of the Ohio History Connection. A1393/000001A.
2. Embossed hand and eye motif. Le Flore County, Oklahoma, Spiro site, AD 900 – 1450. Copper. Collection of Dr. Jim Cox.
3. Engraved shell cup with depiction of Birdman. Le Flore County, Oklahoma, Spiro site. Craig Mound, ca. AD 1400. Stone. National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution. 189121.
4. Beaded necklace. Le Flore County, Oklahoma, Spiro site, AD 1200–1450. Marine shell. Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma. GM 90.383.
5. Tribute point. Le Flore County, Oklahoma, Spiro site, AD 1200–1450. Stone. Collection of Dr. John Rahhal.
6. Feline effigy figure. Le Flore County, Oklahoma, Spiro site. Craig Mound, ca. AD 1400. Flint clay. Department of Anthropology, Smithsonian Institution. A448892-0.
7. Human figure smoking a pipe. Caddoan. Le Flore County, Oklahoma, Spiro site, AD 900–1450. Flint clay. Courtesy of the Oklahoma History Center.
8. Eight-point star motif earspools. Le Flore County, Oklahoma, Spiro site, AD 1200–1450. Stone. Collection of Dr. John Rahhal.
9. Scalloped-rim vessel. Caddoan. Upshur County, Texas, AD 1200–1400. Museum of the Red River, Idabel, Oklahoma. Gift of Don Herron. 08.23.1.
10. Human face effigy with deer antlers. Le Flore County, Oklahoma, Spiro site, AD 1200–1450. Wood. National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution. 189306.
11. Scott Roberts, three-tier brown-war compound bottle with incised line designs, 2010. Muscogee. Museum of the Red River, Idabel, Oklahoma. 11.17.1.
12. Animal effigy bottle of Underwater Panther. Quapaw. Arkansas, AD 1550–1750. Ceramic. Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma. 54.2634.



# Handout B

## Vocabulary Words

**Archaeology:** the study of ancient cultures through excavation of artifacts

**Artifact:** article made or modified by people (i.e., tools, pottery, textiles)

**Celt (selt):** pre-historic stone implement with a beveled cutting edge

**Lightening Whelk Conch (känk, kongk):** a type of seashell from the Gulf of Mexico or the Florida coast which was used by the Spiro people for ornaments, cups, etc.

**Earspools:** spool-shaped earplugs worn buttoned through a hole in the earlobe

**Effigy (ef-i-jee):** a picture or a stuffed figure representing a person

**Gorget (gor-jet, gawr-jit):** stone, shell, metal, or other material that covered the throat and/or upper chest

**Mace (mās):** a ceremonial staff of office; a club-shaped staff of office

**Platform Mound:** mound built with a flat top, usually with a building on top

**Projectile Point:** a sharpened stone piece used on the end of a spear or arrow

**Trade Network:** a system of trading raw materials and finished products among different societies living over a large area



# Handout C

## Exploring Spiro Mounds Museum Activity Sheet



As you tour *Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World* at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, or online, find the object your group studied in class. Review the information provided on the object label. Record a sentence or two of new information about the object.

Select a different object from the exhibition. In the space above, draw the object, labeling any distinctive features. Record a sentence or two explaining why you chose this particular piece.

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# Handout C

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Select a different object from the exhibition. In the space above, draw the object, labeling any distinctive features. Record a sentence or two explaining why you chose this particular piece.

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# Handout C

## Exploring Spiro Mounds Museum Activity Sheet



As you tour *Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World* at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, or online, find the object your group studied in class. Review the information provided on the object label. Record a sentence or two of new information about the object.

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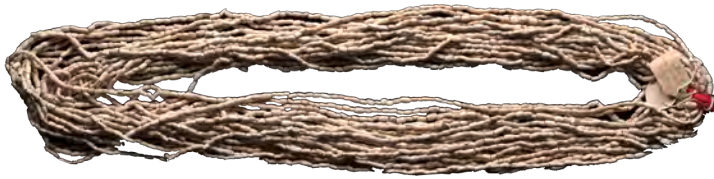
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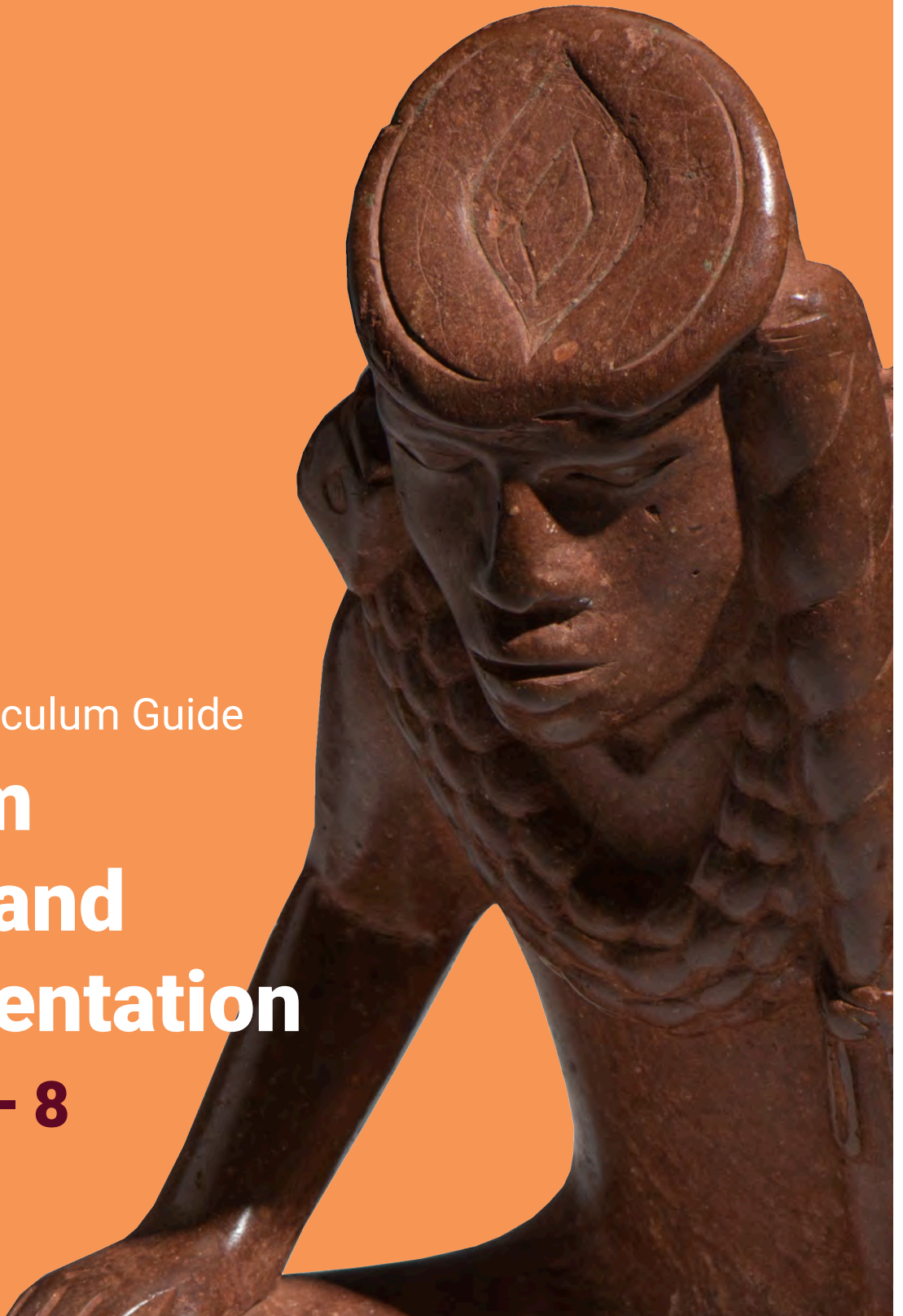
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Exhibition Curriculum Guide

# **Museum Design and Implementation**

**Grades 3 – 8**





Basket/Tray with "Double Duck" pattern. Reproduction of prehistoric may fragment from Mounds Plantation Site. By Claude Medford Jr. Choctaw, Louisiana. February, 1983. Rivercane. The Museum of the Red River. 90.1.14.

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## Essential Question: How do curators design and implement a museum exhibit? What is the impact of looting and archaeology on a museum collection? How do museum exhibits help us understand and preserve the past?

The mounds at Spiro, Oklahoma, are among the most important archaeological remains in the United States. A remarkable assemblage of artifacts from the mounds shows that pre-historic Spiro people created a sophisticated culture which influenced the entire Southeast. There was an extensive trade network, a highly developed religious center, and a political system which controlled the region. Located on a bend of the Arkansas River, the site was a natural gateway between societies to the east and the west, a gateway at which Spiro people exerted their influence. Yet much of the Spiro Culture is still a mystery, including the reason for the decline and abandonment.

Using the example of the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum's *Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World* exhibition, students will begin to realize the incredible amount of time it takes for a museum exhibit to be designed and implemented. Most museum visitors would be amazed to know the planning for this 2021 exhibit began in 2012. Participating in this activity will also enable students to better understanding the job of a museum curator, the impact of looting and how museums help preserve the past.

## Oklahoma Academic Standards: Social Studies Content

- 3.3.2** Read and interpret primary sources related to key events in Oklahoma's past.
- 4.3.2 B.** Explain how the characteristics of culture affect the ways in which people live.
- 6.3.2** Identify and describe cultural traits of language, ethnic heritage, religion, and traditions practiced among peoples.
- 7.1.1** Integrate specific geographic information to support analysis from primary and secondary sources located in texts, documents, newspapers, magazines, journals, political cartoons, and online news sources.



Engraved shell pendant. Le Flore County, Oklahoma, Spiro site, AD 1200–1450. Marine shell with copper. Minneapolis Institute of Art. 31450a.

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# Lesson Procedures

## Pre-Visit Activity

**Engage:** Explore the Essential Question for this lesson by conducting a small/large group discussion on the following prompts:

- Explain to students that today, “We are going back in history to December 15, 1935.” Share the newspaper article from the Kansas City Star (Handout A) on the SMART Board or hand out copies. Read aloud, or, depending on grade level, students may take turns reading aloud. Discuss the importance of the archaeological discovery of Spiro Mounds.



“A ‘King Tut’ Tomb in the Arkansas Valley,” *Kansas City Star*, December 15, 1935.



Excavation at north end of main unit at profiles along rows 19, 20, 21. Southwest view. Le Flore County, Oklahoma, Spiro site. Photograph by R. E. Bell. Ca. 1938. Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, University of Oklahoma.

- Next explain to students that, “Now, we are going to the future—February 12, 2021.” On this date, the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum is opening a new exhibit, *Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World*. This is a collection of 181 objects documenting the incredible materials used from 900 – 1650 A.D. at Spiro Mounds. Explain that they will be visiting the exhibition in person or online, so it is important to learn more about how the exhibit was designed and implemented.
- Have students take notes as you read the “Before” and “After” descriptions of the Spiro Lodge (Appendix A). Have half the students make a “before” drawing and half the students make an “after” drawing. Display these and give students time to think about the differences. Explain that we are fortunate to have what will be on display at the museum but imagine what the exhibit would have looked like if it had been excavated by trained archaeologists from the beginning. Also, remind students that current descendants (probably Caddo and Wichita and Affiliated Tribes) of these mound builders think it should never have been disturbed at all.
- Hold a brief discussion on those issues, honoring all students’ opinions. Possible questions include:
  - How do the objects we have help us understand the lives and culture of the Spiro people?

- What impact does the looting of Spiro have on what we know about this prehistoric site?
- Is it important to preserve the past? Why or why not?
- Should the Spiro mounds have been excavated? Do different groups agree or disagree about this?

## During Museum Visit

- Explain that students are to pay careful attention to how the exhibits are set up during the visit or virtual tour. When they return to the classroom, they will have an opportunity to design and implement a classroom exhibition.
- Give students the Museum Design and Implementation Museum Activity Sheet (Handout B), a clipboard and pencil. Go over the directions for filling out the sheet.
- At the end of the museum tour, collect the Museum Design and Implementation Museum Activity Sheets to use later in the classroom.

## Post-Visit Activities

- Hand out the previously collected Museum Design and Implementation Museum Activity Sheets. Explain that students will use what they observed about museum exhibits to create their own for the school or classroom.
- Read the curator's two-page document (Appendix B) about how the Spiro exhibit was designed and implemented.
- Summarize the steps needed to make the classroom museum a reality:
  1. Decide the theme for the exhibit (Items from the Past/Pioneer Times/etc.).
  2. Determine location – in the classroom/in the hall/on the stage/etc.
  3. Acquire the collection – borrow from friends or relatives or museums and/or find objects in the classroom or around the school. Ask each student or team of students to be responsible for finding one item.

**Note to teacher:** If it is not feasible to have actual items, students can create a virtual exhibit or create artwork to be in the classroom exhibition.

### Helpful websites include:

National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum Google Arts & Culture: [bit.ly/38NFzzD](https://bit.ly/38NFzzD)  
 General Google Arts & Culture: [artsandculture.google.com](https://artsandculture.google.com)

4. Determine how to display objects. Review the Museum Activity Sheets for ideas. Will it sit on a desk/pedestal? Will it hang on the wall? Should it have a light focused on the piece?
  5. Create a timeline. Decide when the grand opening will be held and when other classes or the general public will be able to view the exhibit.
  6. Write paragraph descriptions to produce a museum guide for visitors to use while touring the museum.
  7. Ask the principal and other teachers to publicize the event if it will be open to the public.
  8. Return the borrowed items with thank you notes.
- Have a class discussion reviewing the museum opening process. What worked well? What could have been improved? In groups of two or three students, revisit the essential questions and ask for volunteers to share the discussions with the entire class.
  - Revisit the topic of looting and the importance of preserving the past from the Pre-visit Activities section (bullet # 4).



- Discuss what has been learned about the job of a museum curator. Also, explain to students if they enjoyed going to the museum and creating the exhibition, they can explore other museum careers. This is an opportunity for a “Want to learn more?” project. Encourage students to research on the internet, check for information in libraries, and/or conduct phone interviews with staff at various museums.

## A "KING TUT" TOMB IN THE ARKANSAS VALLEY

On a Negro's Farm in Eastern Oklahoma  
Are Unearthed Relics  
From The Mound Builders of Past Centuries



**EDITOR'S NOTE:** When Howard Carter, British archaeologist, opened the tomb of the ancient Egyptian king, Tut-ankh-Amen, in the valley of the Nile, in 1922, his discoveries became immediately a matter of world-wide interest. But Mr. Carter was supported financially by the earl of Carnarvon, the British Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York.

Recent discoveries in an ancient burial mound in Eastern Oklahoma may be of almost equal historical significance, but are yet to be recognized by any scientific organization. Nor has any museum or wealthy earl come forward with financial support to classify and preserve these centuries-old relics of the Mound Builders who inhabited the valley of the Arkansas probably before the coming of the American Indians.

In the following article Mr. Macdonald of The Star's staff tells how and by whom this great mound was opened and describes some of the important relics that were found in it.

By A. B. MACDONALD.  
SPIRO, OK., Dec. 14.—At his desk in Kansas City the other day sat J. G. Braecklein, architect, archaeologist and anthropologist, when a man entered and said, "They tell me you are interested in things like this!" The stranger unrolled from a package a thing that looked something like a rude cross, made of a yellowish-greenish stone. Before he had a chance to hand it to Braecklein, the archaeologist sprang to his feet, exclaiming: "Good heavens, a ceremonial mace! Where did you get it?" As he held it under his electric light, turning it over and over, smoothing it lovingly with his hands, he kept talking: "My heavens, man, where did you get this?" and without waiting for an answer he held it to the light and shutting one eye, looked through it. Translucent jasper, by gorry, if it isn't! I say, where did you get it?" "I've got six more almost exactly like that out in my car," said the man. "Six more, you say? Like this. Well, there are only about a dozen of these in the whole world, so far as I know."

"There may have been only that many known until I found these," answered the man. "Wait, I'll bring them in."

### Pipe Bowl Like an Idol.

When he came in with them Mr. Braecklein had the first one laid on his desk and was measuring it with a rule. It was sixteen inches long. The other six were about the same length. As the man laid them in a row on his desk Braecklein stood, too much overcome with astonishment to speak, and as he thus stood the man pulled from a pocket a string of freshwater pearls and laid them down. And then from another package he unrolled a flint knife or spear twenty-six inches long, sharp as a needle at both ends, and of exquisite workmanship. Then he untied a paper box and took from it a parcel and carefully unwrapped it and laid upon the desk a sort of idol eleven inches tall. It was the image of a prehistoric Mound Builder carved out of a rare red stone that is said to be found only in one place in South America. The

sculptured man was carved squatting on his haunches, his legs far apart and a hand on each knee. His head was bent and he was looking at the ground. He wore a head dress and a heavy necklace of beads around his neck, and in his ears were round plugs, such as the lost tribes of the ancient Mayans in Yucatan wore, and his hair was dressed in the Mayan fashion, too. Upon his back was a robe of feathers. A large hollow in his bent back, with a hole for a stem at its base, showed that the figure was really a pipe.

"A ceremonial pipe of the Mound Builders," exclaimed Braecklein. "Where on earth did you get all these relics?"

"My name is Balloun of Arkansas, and I and John Hobbs of Spiro, Ok., got all these things and thousands of others, from a mound near Spiro," answered the man.

"Well," said Braecklein, "I have been an accredited correspondent here for many years of the Smithsonian Institution. I have been opening mounds and visiting mounds that were being opened for forty years. I have visited all the great collections of the relics of prehistoric men in this country and I never before saw such a fine collection of ceremonial maces as this you have."

It was this visit of Balloun and this display of relics that took Braecklein and H. J. Player, a member of the State Archaeological Society of Missouri, and myself, on a trip to the mound at Spiro last week. We drove in a car from Kansas City to Fort Smith, where we stayed all night. The next morning, before daylight, (for Braecklein and Player were too excited to wait longer) we drove out on highway 271, along the south bank of the Arkansas River, crossing into Oklahoma, and thus came to Spiro, sixteen miles from Fort Smith.

### Copper That Cuts Iron.

John Hobbs lives with his part-Cherokee wife in a house beside the old Cherokee "trail of tears" along which the Indians of that nation were driven from their homes in Georgia into exile in Indian Territory many years ago. Mr. Hobbs was out on his

porch, studying the weather, when we arrived.

"Yes, sir," he replied to our questions. "The mound lies right over there, close to the Arkansas River, about three miles from here."

On the way down to it, as we leaped across ditches full of water, and mired to our ankles in the soft mud of cotton fields, Hobbs told us the story of the mound, so far as he knew it.

In a length of about a mile along the bottom land of the river there were twelve of these mounds of varying size, all oblong in shape and their greater length lying directly east and west. Twenty years ago he and Jim Tibbitts dug into the largest of the twelve mounds and found an earthen water bottle of peculiar shape and a copper chisel twelve inches long. The copper was tempered so hard that, to test it, he cut nicks in an iron rod with it.

"But," interrupted Braecklein, as he plodded through the mud of a wet cotton field, "Gerard Powke says in one of his great books, 'Prehistoric Objects Classified and Described,' that the belief that some early races of men knew how to temper copper and make it hard is incorrect. He says 'that no such 'lost art' ever existed in any part of the world, and," added Braecklein, "Powke was one of the best informed men who ever wrote about those things."

"I don't care what he wrote," insisted Hobbs. "I know that I dug this copper chisel out of that mound and it would nick iron. I gave that chisel to Lear Howe of Glendale, Ark., and then a rich oil man came down here and opened one of these mounds, spent about \$2,000 doing it, and didn't find a thing. After that failure nobody bothered with the mounds until two years ago when I and several others leased the biggest mound, the one in which I had found the copper chisel. The land with the mound on it is owned by a Negro. We paid him \$350 for the right to dig into it."

### Built of Tamped Earth.

By the time the story had reached this point we had come to the mound. By actual measurement it is 300 feet long and at its base is 100 feet wide. It has a conical mound with steep sides at one end. This slopes off into a smooth-topped bench or platform that extends out eastward for 200 feet.

All over the top and sides of the mound much shrubbery and weeds are growing, and a sprinkling of trees, some of them with trunks a foot in diameter. The taller conical part of the mound is now 56 feet high but evidently it had been much higher and has been worn down by weather. This mound had been built up with soft earth. Braecklein said all of the earth in the mound had been carried there in baskets and piled up. A deep depression filled with water, about 100 feet away, showed where the earth had come from.

The first digging by Hobbs and his men had been done in the top of the level part, which is about 15 feet high. It was hard digging for the soil seemed to have been tamped down. It was so hard and dry. All over that part of the mound, eight feet or so below the surface, skeletons were found, the bones blackened as if they had been in a fire, and shreds of charred basket work and woven fabrics mixed with a pitch-like sub-



# KANSAS CITY STAR.

KANSAS CITY, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15, 1935.

SECTION C

stance. There were hundreds of these skeletons, lying in pockets sometimes three and four deep. A physician in Fort Smith took one of the skeletons, of average size, and, measuring it, decided that the man had been seven feet tall.

Mixed with these bones, and beneath them, were pipes of reddish stone with stems from 5 to 18 inches long; copper and bone needles and shuttles, thousands of beads of shell, bone and crystal and thousands of flint arrowheads of fine workmanship. The skeletons, in city, were left lying where found and the earth of other holes shoveled onto them, but

it had been rammed down, and this compactness had kept moisture from penetrating it and so had helped preserve the objects that were found inside it.

## Room Held Museum Treasures.

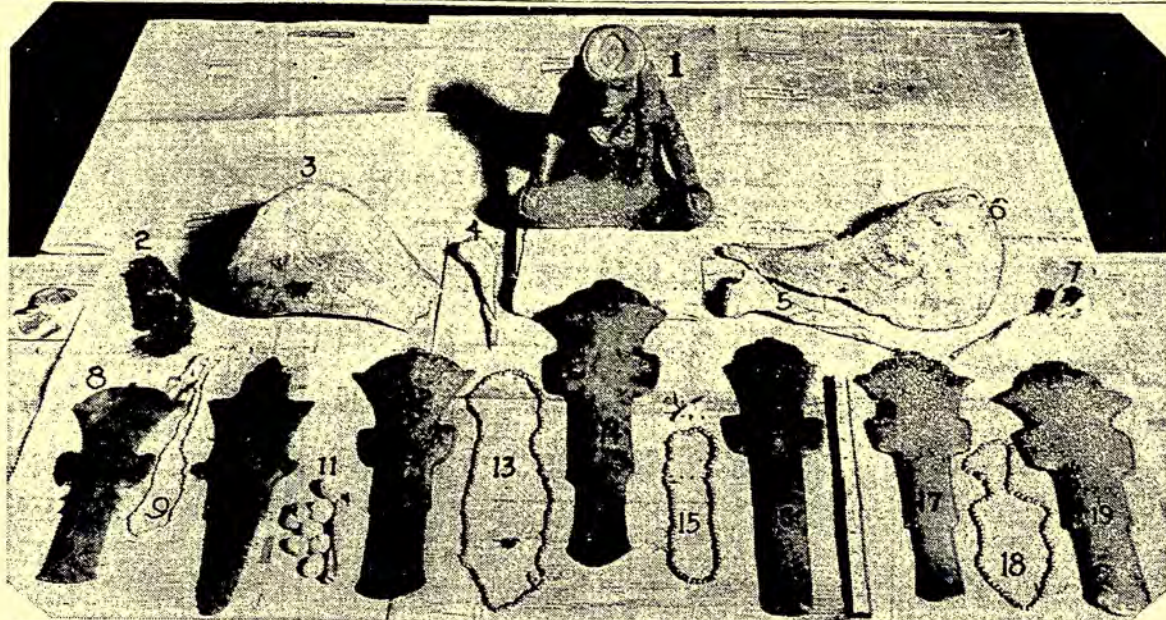
In the exact center and bottom of the conical mound they came upon a circular room. It was in the form of an Indian tepee, fourteen feet in diameter at its base, eighteen feet high at its center. Evidently the mound builders had first dug a circular depression in the earth, about five feet deep, had smoothed off its floor, and had then built the tepee of cedar

poles were seen by many with whom I talked. I myself have seen many of them, and many of them are scattered in museums and in the hands of collectors throughout this country. Two of the large pipes found there are in the museum of the public library in Kansas City.

This room was floored with cedar poles and on top of them was laid a blanket woven of some material that might have been the fiber from tree bark. On top of this was a pile of thousands of beads of all sorts and shapes, carved from shells. Some were made from small shells that had holes bored through them, length-

homes of Hobbs and Balloun, and the ground around the mound was strewn with thousands of them.

Upon this same floor and blanket was more than a peck of pearls that came from fresh-water mussels. These had to be divided into four equal parts, too, and thus it was found that there were eight quarts of them. If these thousands of pearls had been as sound and good as when taken from their shells they would have been worth a fortune, but they were all "dead;" that is, they had lost their luster from lying so long under ground. Some had become so soft that they could be rubbed to



AT THE TOP IS A GROUP OF RELICS FOUND IN THE MOUND BUILT BY A PREHISTORIC PEOPLE NEAR SPIRO, OK., AND RECENTLY OPENED. NO. 1 IS A PIPE BOWL EIGHTEEN INCHES HIGH, MADE OF A RED STONE AND SHOWING MARKED MAYAN CHARACTERISTICS. NO. 2 IS A FRAGMENT OF CHARRED CLOTH. NOS. 3 AND 6 ARE CONCH SHELLS FROM THE GULF OF MEXICO, AND 4, 5 AND 7 ARE CORES OF CONCH SHELLS THAT IT IS BELIEVED WERE USED AS ORNAMENTS. NOS. 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 17 AND 19 ARE "MACES," OR SCEPTERS, OF JASPER AND COLORED FLINT, SUPPOSEDLY USED BY CHIEFS OR PRIESTS IN RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES. NOS. 9, 13, 15 AND 18 ARE STRINGS OF FRESH WATER PEARLS AND NO. 11 IS A GROUP OF BEADS MADE FROM SHELLS, THOUSANDS OF WHICH WERE FOUND IN THE MOUND.

(LEFT BELOW) JOHN HOBBS, OWNER OF A HALF INTEREST IN THE SPIRO MOUND, AND TWO OF HIS DIGGERS ARE SHOWN IN THEIR CAMP AT THE SITE. HOBBS IS THE MAN AT THE RIGHT.

(RIGHT BELOW) PART OF AN ENGRAVED CONCH SHELL FOUND IN THE MOUND, THE HEAD AND OTHER DESIGNS SHOWING A MARKED RESEMBLANCE TO THE ART OF THE ANCIENT MAYANS.

(BOTTOM LEFT) THE SPIRO MOUND, SHOWING THE EXCAVATION THAT OPENED INTO THE TREASURE CHAMBER OF RELICS OF AN ANCIENT AMERICAN CULTURE.

ound the mound I saw parts of skeletons lying on the ground or protruding from the mud. I saw many teeth and short toe and finger bones and maybe a hundred leg and arm bones.

Having explored pretty thoroughly the bench part of the mound, Hobbs and his men tunneled into the tall part of the mound. Their shaft began at the level of the outside field and went straight in. After they got in eight or ten feet, they found the earth almost as hard as cement, as if

poles eighteen feet long, all stood closely together, their butts resting on the outer ring of the circle and their tops coming together at the apex of it. Then the earth had been carried and packed solidly down all around it and above it to the top of the mound.

There is no doubt about this room and what was found in it. Hundreds of persons saw it. I was in the tunnel, myself, but, of course, everything had been carried out of the room long before. But all those ob-

jects were seen by many with whom I talked. I myself have seen many of them, and many of them are scattered in museums and in the hands of collectors throughout this country. Two of the large pipes found there are in the museum of the public library in Kansas City.

wise. These shells had to be divided into four equal portions, because four men were interested in the digging and each got an equal share. Therefore, the beads were weighed and there were 1,200 pounds of them, each with a hole through its center. I saw bushels of these beads at the



## Appendix A

### Before Description of the Spirit Lodge in Craig Mound at Spiro Mounds:

Refer back to this paragraph from the 1935 Kansas City Star article (Handout A):

“This room was floored with cedar poles and on top of was laid a blanket woven of some material that might have been the fiber from tree bark. On top of this was a pile of thousands of beads of all sorts and shapes, carved from shells. Some were made from small shells that holes bored through them, length-wise.”

It is believed that the approximately 16 x 33-foot hollow chamber or Spirit Lodge, in the mound's interior contained baskets with thousands of freshwater pearls, more than eight hundred engraved and unengraved conch shell cups, stone and wooden statues, baskets, feathered textiles, large copper plates, pipes of reddish stone, flint arrowheads, piles of blankets, bead necklaces, maces, celts, axes, arrowheads, spearpoints, and pottery vessels. The walls were adorned with colored cloth woven of fur, hair, and feathers. Baskets with ceremonial items that embodied powerful mythical and sacred beings were all around the room. No two baskets had the same designs. Many were double weave baskets with lids. There was a pair of copper-covered cedar deer antlers and copper feather plumes, marine shell pendants (gorgets), copper-covered headdress pieces and specialized minerals like ocher and mica. Inside the room, raised altars covered with blankets and holding stacks of 100s of beads were in the four corners. There were piles of human bones, cups, figurines, and breastplates made of shell, copper-covered baskets holding kernels of blue and white Indian corn, and a huge variety of pottery vessels. There were projectile points and human head effigies. A cone made of cedar poles ringed the room and pointed inward, somewhat like teepee poles. There were over 500 pounds of mineral pigments in the colors of red, yellow, black, gray, and green.

### After Description of the Spirit Lodge at Spiro Mounds:

“As described by Forrest E. Clements, head of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Oklahoma, in 1935 (note: after the looting/excavation by the men of the Pocola Mining Company), “Sections of cedar poles lay scattered on the ground, fragments of feather and fur textiles littered the whole area; it is impossible to take a single step in hundreds of square yards around the ruined structure without scuffling broken pieces of pottery, sections of engraved shell, and beads of shell, stone, and bone.”

As the diggers hauled items out of the mounds, they left objects laying around the entrance to the tunnel they had dug. Those objects were trampled and burned. Human skeletons (burials of the elite) were dumped outside and immediately began to decay. The destruction was enormous. The cedar poles had no value to the looters so they pulled them out and burned them. Handfuls of beads, pearls, and arrowheads were carried out of the work site and scattered around. Many of the engraved conch shells were broken and trampled underfoot. The looters had ripped human remains and priceless objects from the ground, including conch shells carved with incredible images, earspools, axes, maces, and baskets made from cane, grasses, feathers, rabbit fur, and hides. The blankets, stone sculptures, baskets, copper items, and other relics were removed leaving an empty hollow room with crushed and discarded broken piece of these valuable objects scattered on the ground.



Excavation at south end of main unit. Le Flore County, Oklahoma, Spiro site. Photograph by R. E. Bell. Ca. 1938. Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, University of Oklahoma.

# Handout B

## Museum Design and Implementation Museum Activity Sheet

**As you tour the museum, carefully observe how the museum objects are displayed.**

**A 360-virtual tour can be found at [spiromounds.com](http://spiromounds.com)**

How is information about each object shared with the museum visitor? Are all objects at the same height? How are videos or photographs displayed? Are all objects in cases? Are some objects displayed on walls? Record your observations below:

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**As you make observations, record the following:**

The name of one object with special lighting.

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The name of one object that is raised above waist level.

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The name of one object that is displayed on a wall.

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Two objects that are displayed together.

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## Appendix B

### The Genesis of Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World

This project began in May 2012 at the Mississippian Iconographic Workshop at Texas State University. This workshop revolved around discussions regarding the possibility that a separate “Spirit Lodge” was built within the upper portion of the Craig Mound. It was speculated that this hollow chamber represented a sacred architectural space totally unique in the field of Mississippian research. At this time, I was the assistant curator of anthropology at the University of Tulsa Gilcrease Museum and a workshop participant. In that role, I began contacting and working with other scholars and museum professionals to ascertain the feasibility for a Spiro Mounds exhibition.

It was decided this project would contextualize the Spiro Mounds within the larger Mississippian framework, and explore the specific evolution and development of the site—including its unique ceremonial structure. In October 2012, before any significant work was undertaken, I traveled to meet with the Caddo Nation and Wichita and Affiliated Tribes Tribal Councils to ask for their support. There was no need to explain the importance of the site to either Nation, as Spiro is well known and immensely respected by both communities.

In 2013, the Gilcrease Museum invited Caddo and Wichita tribal members as well as curators from the National Museum of the American Indian, National Museum of Natural History, Sam Noble Museum, Oklahoma Historical Society, University of Arkansas, and Spiro Mounds Archaeological Center to Tulsa to begin conversations regarding the viability of the project. During this meeting, the scale and scope of Spiro objects in museum collections across the United States were discussed and evaluated. Participants identified the criteria required for loans and the timeframe needed to properly undertake an exhibition of this magnitude.

During the planning grant period, the team of National Advisors developed and refined the themes of the exhibition, the nature of its accompanying publication, the size of the exhibition, and audience-related educational programming. Over the next year, the Gilcrease Museum worked with the team of advisors via skype and in person to create the exhibition

layout, refine the themes, develop an object list, and determine the educational programming.

In the summer and fall of 2014, I inventoried and photographed the University of Tulsa and Gilcrease Museum collections of Spiro and Mississippian material, traveled to the Sam Noble Museum, LeFlore County Historical Society Museum, Oklahoma Historical Society, Wootaroc Museum, and the University of Arkansas to study their holdings of Spiro artifacts, and meet with key members of the Oklahoma Archeological Survey and the Arkansas Archeological Survey at Spiro to understand their ongoing field work at the site. In the fall of 2015, project team members made trips to nearly eleven public and private collections to view more Spiro material.

At the conclusion of the highly informative and productive planning grant period, the Gilcrease Museum determined that, based upon plans by the City of Tulsa to expand the museum’s physical size and renovate its building, it could no longer host the exhibition. Therefore, the Spiro Mounds project changed the hosting venue to the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum. This switch was predicated on two factors. First, I had recently changed professional appointments and accepted the post of Curator of Ethnology at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, and second, this move ensured that the project was developed and hosted by an Oklahoma museum with national resources and accessible to tribal members of the Caddo Nation and Wichita and Affiliated Tribes.

Throughout this process, the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum remained in contact with the Caddo and Wichita Nations updating them on the overall progress of the project and inviting community members and elders to the Museum to review its development. We also contracted with the University of Texas to have a graduate student develop the project’s touchscreen map of the United States, highlighting trade routes and other supplementary data.

In 2018 and 2019, all participants were invited once again to the Mississippian Iconographic Workshop at Texas State University, San Marcos. Together, these assembled humanities scholars discussed the ongoing development of the project and numerous other topics such as the value of utilizing private versus



museum collections. In the spring and summer of 2019, we finalized all loans and contracted photographers to help photograph objects not made available by specific museums or lenders. On August 1, 2019, we received the chapters from each author for the exhibit publication. We began the editing process and associating all exhibition objects and related images to specific chapters.

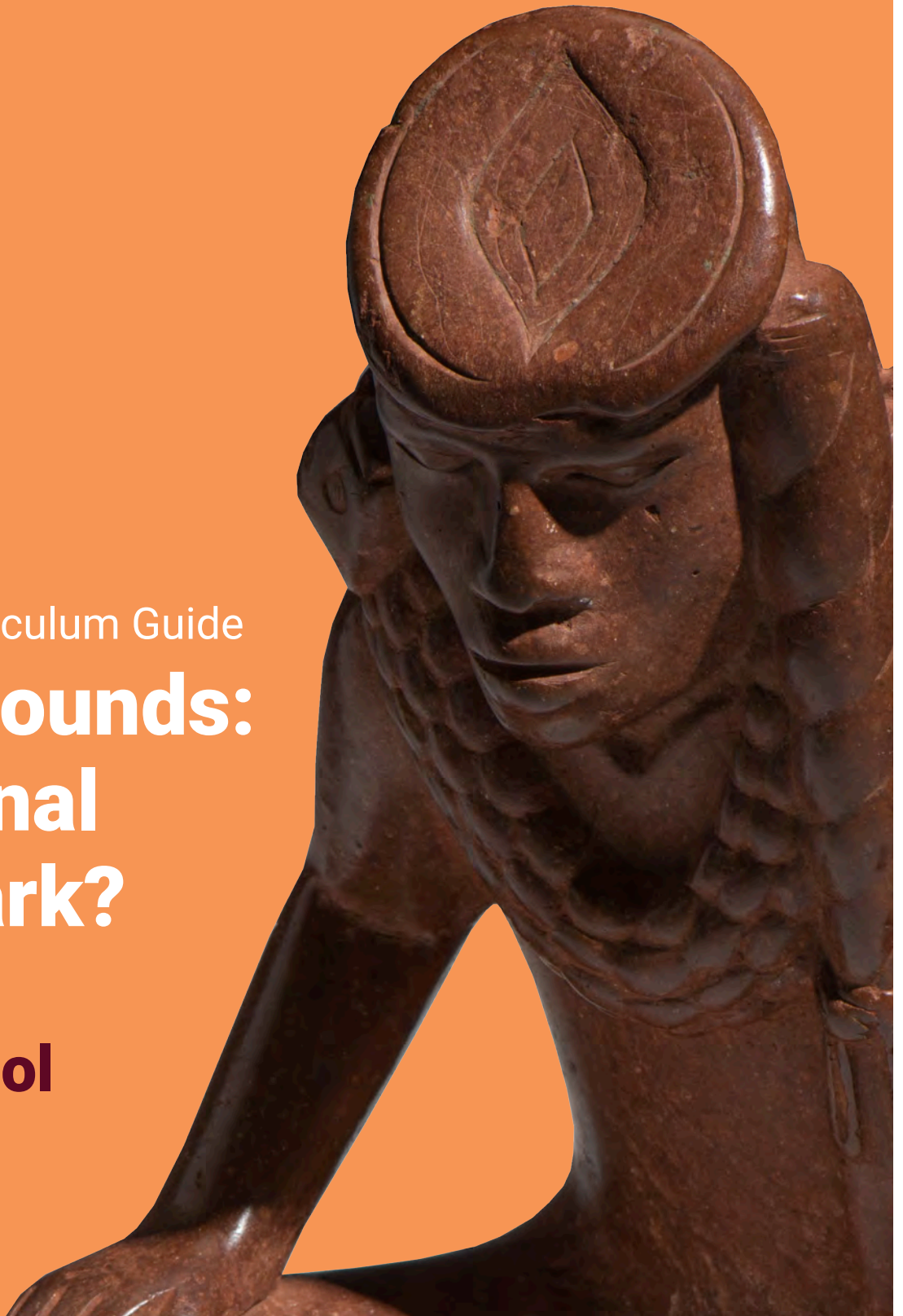
This long process of design and implementation will culminate on February 12, 2020 when *Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World* opens at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum.

Eric D. Singleton, PhD  
Curator of Ethnology  
National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum

Exhibition Curriculum Guide

# **Spiro Mounds: A National Landmark?**

**Middle –  
High School**





Map of Spiro with features. Produced by Wes Gutekunst and the National Cowboy & Western History Museum.



Map of Oklahoma with Spiro identified. Produced by Wes Gutekunst and the National Cowboy & Western History Museum.

## Essential Question: What makes some historic sites worth protecting?

The mounds at Spiro, Oklahoma, are among the most important archaeological remains in the United States. A remarkable assemblage of artifacts from the mounds shows that pre-historic Spiro people created a sophisticated culture which influenced the entire Southeast. There was an extensive trade network, a highly developed religious center, and a political system which controlled the region. Located on a bend of the Arkansas River, the site was a natural gateway between societies to the east and the west, a gateway at which Spiro people exerted their influence. Yet much of the Spiro Culture is still a mystery, including the reason for the decline and abandonment.

# Oklahoma Academic Standards:

Note: While this lesson focuses primarily on social studies practices related to evidence, interpretation and evidence-based writing, the historical content of the Spiro exhibit can also be aligned to any of the content area standards listed below. Teachers may also find this lesson appropriate for several ELA academic standards related to writing and argumentation.

## Social Studies Practices:

- Acquire, Apply, and Evaluate Evidence
- Understanding and using strategies to analyze evidence in the social studies. Students will evaluate historical, geographic, and economic information. Students will draw conclusions from primary and secondary sources to formulate informed decisions.
- Read Critically and Interpret Information Sources
- Understanding the purpose of engaging with text. Students will evaluate factual information and points of view as presented in text. Students will read historical and contemporary texts to engage in collaborative discussion.
- Engage in Evidence-Based Writing
- Understanding the multiple purposes of the writing process. Students will develop written products designed for a variety of social studies related investigations. Students will use and integrate evidence to present knowledge and support their opinion.

## Geography

- 6.4 The student will analyze the interactions of humans and their environment in the Western Hemisphere
- 6.4.3 Analyze the impact of climate and natural disasters on human populations, including forced migration, scarcity of consumer goods, economic activities, and loss of life.

## OK History

- OKH.1.2 Summarize the accomplishments of pre-contact cultures including the Spiro Mound Builders.
- OKH.1.3 Compare the goals and significance of early Spanish, French, and American interactions with American Indians, including trade, the impact of disease, the arrival of the horse, and new technologies.

## Sociology

- S.6 The student will examine social change over time and the various factors that lead to these changes.
- S.6.1 Examine environmental, political, economic, scientific, and technological influences upon immediate and long-term social change.
- S.7 The student will analyze social problems that affect large numbers of people or result from imbalances within a social system.

# Lesson Procedures

## Pre-Visit Activities

**Engage:** Explore the Essential Question for this lesson by conducting a small/large group discussion on the following prompts:

- Ask students to discuss the Essential Question for this lesson: **What makes some historic sites worth protecting?** What historic sites have they visited? How did they know it was a historic site? What evidence did they see that it was “protected”? What do they think it means when a site is “protected”? Who does the “protecting”? Can they think of sites that are not currently protected that should be? Facilitate this conversation with a strategy that works best in your classroom.
- If a site should be designated as protected, what criteria should be used? Ask students to brainstorm a short list of criteria and list the criteria for all to see.
- Explain to students that at the state, national and international level there are many laws and organizations in place to protect significant historic, cultural and natural sites. In the United States, the National Park Service designates some sites as National Historic Landmarks (NHL) and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) works at an international level to designate and promote the protection of globally important sites.

**Note:** This lesson contains information for the NHL program but could easily be adapted for UNESCO World Heritage Sites ([whc.unesco.org/en/list](http://whc.unesco.org/en/list)).

- Share with students a selection of images of National Historic Landmarks protected sites. A comprehensive listing by state can be found here: [www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalhistoriclandmarks/list-of-nhls-by-state.htm](http://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalhistoriclandmarks/list-of-nhls-by-state.htm). Select sites that best connect to your course content, themes or discussions. If time allows, allow students to browse the site and collect their own favorites to share with each other or the class.

**Explain:** Share Handout A with students and review the criteria for inclusion as a National Historic Landmark site and compare it with the criteria for protection they generated previously.

- Explain that students will be visiting a museum exhibition *Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World* or virtually at [spiromounds.com](http://spiromounds.com), an important pre-Columbian North American ceremonial site. Their task will be to determine if they think the site qualifies under any/all of the NHL criteria. Remind students that the Essential Question they must answer is: **What makes some historic sites worth protecting?** The NHL criteria are listed on the Handout and are on the next page for teacher reference.



# National Landmark Criteria

### Criterion 1

Properties that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to, and are identified with, or that outstandingly represent, the broad national patterns of United States history and from which an understanding and appreciation of those patterns may be gained.

This criterion is used for properties that are associated with major events or major patterns in American history. The property should possess one of the strongest associations possible with a nationally significant historical event or pattern.

Example: Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Building (Brown Building), New York, NY

### Criterion 2

Properties that are associated importantly with the lives of persons nationally significant in the history of the United States.

This criterion is used for properties associated with individuals who have made a significant or exceptional contribution to American history. The individual's association with the property must be connected to the specific period when he or she made his or her contributions to American history. Properties that are not associated with an individual's significant accomplishments, such as birthplaces, childhood homes, vacation homes, or retirement homes, are usually not eligible.

Example: The Eudora Welty House, Jackson, MS

### Criterion 3

Properties that represent some great idea or ideal of the American people.

This criterion relates to properties that represent an overarching ideal unique to the United States. This ideal could be a belief, principle, or goal. The application of this criterion requires the most careful scrutiny and applies only in rare instances.

Example: Freedom Tower, Miami, FL

### Criterion 4

Properties that embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen exceptionally valuable for a study of a period, style, or method of construction, or that represent a significant,



Freedom Tower, Miami, FL; Image for educational purposes only.





The Wainwright Building. Photograph by Chris Naffziger; Image for educational purposes only.

distinctive and exceptional entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

This criterion is used for properties that are exceptionally important works for their design, either as an individual building or a collection of buildings/resources comprising a district.

Example: Wainwright Building, St. Louis, MO

## Criterion 5

Properties that are composed of integral parts of the environment not sufficiently significant by reason of historical association or artistic merit to warrant individual recognition but collectively compose an entity of exceptional historical or artistic significance, or outstandingly commemorate or illustrate a way of life or culture.

A majority of the historic districts that are recognized by this criterion are nationally significant for their extraordinary historic importance in illustrating or commemorating a way of life or culture. Criterion 5 is rarely used on its own; many of these historic districts also use Criterion 1.

Example: Beacon Hill Historic District, Boston, MA

## Criterion 6

Properties that have yielded or may be likely to yield information of major scientific importance by revealing new cultures, or by shedding light upon periods of occupation over large areas of the United States. Such sites are those which have yielded, or which may reasonably be expected to yield, data affecting theories, concepts and ideas to a major degree.

This criterion most often recognizes nationally significant archeological properties. Data produced at these sites have already produced and are likely to yield nationally significant information.

- Prepare students for a visit to the *Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World* exhibition (or to the accompanying website, [spiromounds.com](http://spiromounds.com)) as appropriate with background readings and classroom discussions about the Spiro people and culture. Let them know that while at the exhibit, their task will be to determine if the site should be protected as a National Historic Landmark.

## During Museum Visit or Virtual Tour

**(Be sure that students have Handout A as they visit the exhibit.)**

- As best fits your teaching preferences, ask students to record information as it relates to the six NHL criteria on Handout A. You may ask students to do this individually or in small groups. You might also jigsaw the group with the six criteria and ask them to look specifically for only one or two criteria and then compare notes. Remind them to use the handout to write down evidence to support their claims.
- Be sure to point out that the third section of the exhibit focuses on looting that took place at Spiro Mounds. This is an essential area of the exhibit as it relates to protection of sites. Direct students to pay close attention to this section to learn about the dangers that historic sites face.



Destroyed mounds at Spiro site. Le Flore County, Oklahoma, Spiro site. Ca. 1935. Photograph by R. E. Bell. Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, University of Oklahoma.

- Before leaving the museum exhibit, gather students for a conversation about the Essential Question for this lesson: **What makes some historic sites worth protecting?** Do they believe that the Spiro site is worth protecting? Should it be a designated NHL site? Collect student handouts or remind students to bring it with them to class.

## Post-Visit Activities

- In small or large groups, discuss what students learned about Spiro culture and the site. Review the six criteria and ask students to discuss or vote on each one as it relates to Spiro. Through consensus building discussion, come to a conclusion about the importance of Spiro Mounds as a NHL site.
- Show students a picture of what Spiro Mounds looks like today (use [spiromounds.com](http://spiromounds.com) to locate a picture) and ask them if they think what it looks like today might influence the way people perceive its importance. It is not as striking or monumental as some other sites might be. Does this influence the way people think about it? Do sites like Spiro Moounds still deserve to be protected?



Aerial view of Craig Mound. Le Flore County, Oklahoma, Spiro site. Photograph by Scott W. Hammerstedt.

- Share with students that while Spiro was heavily looted and damaged in the early 20th Century, it has subsequently been protected by Oklahoma and U.S. legislation. More information about legislation for protected sites can be found here: [nps.gov/Archeology/public/publicLaw.htm](https://nps.gov/Archeology/public/publicLaw.htm).



WPA excavation. Le Flore County, Oklahoma, Spiro site. Unknown Photographer. Ca. 1938. Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, University of Oklahoma.

- Ask students to prepare a written statement arguing for or against designation of Spiro Mounds as a NHL and answering the Essential Question: **What makes some sites worth protecting?** They should use information they gathered while at the museum to support their claims. This could take the form of a letter to the National Park Service or other elected official.
- Multiple Modalities: Using [spiromounds.com](http://spiromounds.com), ask students to curate a selection of images from the exhibit that make the best argument for NHL inclusion. You might also include a written statement to accompany the document.
- If time allows, explore the criteria for National Park designations. Do students believe Spiro Mounds would qualify under these criteria?

# Handout A

## Spiro Mounds: A National Historic Landmark?

For each of the four parts of the exhibit, jot down evidence for or against inclusion of the Spiro site as a National Historic Landmark.

*The six criteria for NHL status are on the reverse side of this paper for your review.*

### Section 1:

#### Mississippian World

Evidence for/against inclusion as a NHL

### Section 2:

#### Site and Ceremony

Evidence for/against inclusion as a NHL

### Section 3:

#### Archaeology and Looting

Evidence for/against inclusion as a NHL

### Section 4:

#### Cultural Continuation

Evidence for/against inclusion as a NHL

# NHL Criteria

**Criterion 1** Properties that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to, and are identified with, or that outstandingly represent, the broad national patterns of United States history and from which an understanding and appreciation of those patterns may be gained.

This criterion is used for properties that are associated with major events or major patterns in American history. The property should possess one of the strongest associations possible with a nationally significant historical event or pattern.

**Criterion 2** Properties that are associated importantly with the lives of persons nationally significant in the history of the United States.

This criterion is used for properties associated with individuals who have made a significant or exceptional contribution to American history. The individual's association with the property must be connected to the specific period when he or she made his or her contributions to American history. Properties that are not associated with an individual's significant accomplishments, such as birthplaces, childhood homes, vacation homes, or retirement homes, are usually not eligible.

**Criterion 3** Properties that represent some great idea or ideal of the American people.

This criterion relates to properties that represent an overarching ideal unique to the United States. This ideal could be a belief, principle, or goal. The application of this criterion requires the most careful scrutiny and applies only in rare instances.

**Criterion 4** Properties that embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen exceptionally valuable for a study of a period, style, or method of construction, or that represent a significant, distinctive and exceptional entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

This criterion is used for properties that are exceptionally important works for their design, either as an individual building or a collection of buildings/resources comprising a district.

**Criterion 5** Properties that are composed of integral parts of the environment not sufficiently significant by reason of historical association or artistic merit to warrant individual recognition but collectively compose an entity of exceptional historical or artistic significance, or outstandingly commemorate or illustrate a way of life or culture.

A majority of the historic districts that are recognized by this criterion are nationally significant for their extraordinary historic importance in illustrating or commemorating a way of life or culture. Criterion 5 is rarely used on its own; many of these historic districts also use Criterion 1.

**Criterion 6** Properties that have yielded or may be likely to yield information of major scientific importance by revealing new cultures, or by shedding light upon periods of occupation over large areas of the United States. Such sites are those which have yielded, or which may reasonably be expected to yield, data affecting theories, concepts and ideas to a major degree.

This criterion most often recognizes nationally significant archeological properties. Data produced at these sites have already produced and are likely to yield nationally significant information.





Exhibition Curriculum Guide

# **The Curator's Argument**

**Middle –  
High School**



# Essential Question:

## How do curators and historians build an argument?

The mounds at Spiro, Oklahoma, are among the most important archaeological remains in the United States. A remarkable assemblage of artifacts from the mounds shows that pre-historic Spiro people created a sophisticated culture which influenced the entire Southeast. There was an extensive trade network, a highly developed religious center, and a political system which controlled the region. Located on a bend of the Arkansas River, the site was a natural gateway between societies to the east and the west, a gateway at which Spiro people exerted their influence. Yet much of the Spiro Culture is still a mystery, including the reason for the decline and abandonment.

## Oklahoma Academic Standards:

**Note:** While this lesson focuses primarily on social studies practices related to evidence, interpretation and evidence-based writing, the historical content of the Spiro exhibit can also be aligned to any of the content area standards listed below. Teachers may also find this lesson appropriate for several ELA academic standards related to writing and argumentation.

### Social Studies Practices

- Acquire, Apply, and Evaluate Evidence
- Understanding and using strategies to analyze evidence in the social studies. Students will evaluate historical, geographic, and economic information. Students will draw conclusions from primary and secondary sources to formulate informed decisions.
- Read Critically and Interpret Information Sources
- Understanding the purpose of engaging with text. Students will evaluate factual information and points of view as presented in text. Students will read historical and contemporary texts to engage in collaborative discussion.
- Engage in Evidence-Based Writing
- Understanding the multiple purposes of the writing process. Students will develop written products designed for a variety of social studies related investigations. Students will use and integrate evidence to present knowledge and support their opinion.

### Geography

- 6.4** The student will analyze the interactions of humans and their environment in the Western Hemisphere
- 6.4.3** Analyze the impact of climate and natural disasters on human populations, including forced migration, scarcity of consumer goods, economic activities, and loss of life.

### OK History

- OKH.1.2** Summarize the accomplishments of pre-contact cultures including the Spiro Mound Builders.
- OKH.1.3** Compare the goals and significance of early Spanish, French, and American interactions with American Indians, including trade, the impact of disease, the arrival of the horse, and new technologies.



Crested bird gorget. Mississippian. Le Flore County, Oklahoma, Spiro site, AD 1350–1450. Shell. Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.



Monolithic axe. Mississippian. Le Flore County, Oklahoma, Spiro site, AD 1300–1400. Stone. Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma. GM 61.18910.

## Sociology

- S.6** The student will examine social change over time and the various factors that lead to these changes.
- S.6.1** Examine environmental, political, economic, scientific, and technological influences upon immediate and long-term social change.
- S.7** The student will analyze social problems that affect large numbers of people or result from imbalances within a social system.

## Lesson Procedures:

### Before your visit to the exhibit

**Engage:** Engage learners in the lesson by telling them that they have 10 minutes to carefully select four objects in the classroom (or the school) that **BEST REPRESENT** the daily activities that take place in the room for a museum exhibit about the school. Tell them to select carefully and with purpose and that they will need to justify their decision. See accompanying student Handout A – Curating the Classroom.

**Note:** If students are learning remotely this year, this lesson plan can be adapted to their personal possessions, e.g. “What four personal objects best represent who you are as a person?”

- Ask students to use Handout A to record the four objects and sketch the objects they have selected. Be sure to encourage students to include information on the handout about **WHY** they selected the objects that they did. **HOW** do these objects best represent what happens in the classroom every day? Ask students if these items would be considered primary or secondary sources to a historian. \*Note: you may want to confirm that learners have an understanding of primary and secondary sources as they apply to historic inquiry.
- Tell students that they must now narrow their four objects to the two most important objects that represent daily life in the classroom. Ask them to star or circle or otherwise indicate on the handout which two objects best exemplify what happens in the classroom every day. This is an important step in curating. Explain to students that they need to be able to justify what they considered including but ultimately decided against.
- Ask students to share their objects in small or large group discussion. Through discussion and consensus building, try to arrive at a list of the top 3 – 5 objects that best represent the classroom space (or their personal lives) and then ask students

to write (individually, or in small or large groups) a brief statement that summarizes how the final list of objects represents the classroom space. Be sure to connect the conversation to the Essential Question for the lesson: **How do curators and historians build an argument?**

- Wrap this up by explaining to students that they just engaged in the act of “curating” and the final statement they have crafted is a “curatorial statement” that explains their choices.

### **Explore: In preparation for a museum visit, select some of the sample prompts below to conduct a class discussion or a writing assignment.**

- What do you associate with the word “curate”? What does it mean to “curate” something? What does a curator do in a museum? After discussion, share with students this definition of curate: “To curate is to select, organize and look after the objects or works of art in a museum or an art gallery or for a special exhibition.” Ask students to think about ways this is similar to the work of an historian in gathering sources and writing an historical argument.
- How is a museum different from a gallery? What is an “exhibition” or an “exhibit”? Have you ever visited an exhibition at a museum? What was it?
- Ask students to discuss the meaning of this statement: “Every exhibition is an argument.” (Connect this prompt back to the initial activity by asking students to recall the statement they wrote about the classroom objects. What argument were they making about their classroom space by selecting those particular objects? Discuss this with students in small or large groups.)
- If time allows or alternatively, provide this example: If I asked you to “curate” your Instagram or TikTok account, what would you do? If time and school policy allows, showcase an Instagram account as an example.
- Share with students that when planning an exhibition, the curator makes careful selections about what does and what does NOT get into the exhibit. For weeks (or sometimes even years!) before an exhibit opens, the curator has made scores of decisions about what objects to include and not include, the exhibit texts, displays, wall colors, etc. As a result of these choices, curators are trying to develop and share an argument about the exhibit topic with museum patrons who will visit the exhibit.
- Prepare students for a visit to the *Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World* exhibition (or to the accompanying website, [spiromounds.com](http://spiromounds.com)) as appropriate with background readings and classroom discussions about the Spiro people and culture. Let them know that while at the exhibit, their task will be to learn about the people of Spiro mounds and their ongoing cultural legacy in Native American Plains cultures by “thinking like a curator” to uncover the main argument of the exhibit.

### **During your visit in person or virtually**

**Explore:** Once at the exhibit, inform students that the curator has divided the exhibit into four sections: *The Mississippian World*, *Site and Ceremony*, *Archaeology and Looting* and *Cultural Continuation*. They should look at each section independently and then as a whole to determine the main argument of the exhibit. Be sure to connect the conversation to the Essential Question for the lesson: **How do curators and historians build an argument?**

- Provide copies of Handout B- Curating the Exhibition and remind students that their task is to uncover the main argument of the Spiro exhibit curator and to use the handout to sketch objects and document evidence of the curators argument about Spiro in each of the four main sections of the exhibit. Remind students to examine the written text that accompanies each item.
- On the handout students are asked to record what they believe the main argument is and one or two curated primary source objects that support the curators argument and secondary source evidence from exhibit texts. When they have visited all four sections of the exhibition, they should consider all of



their evidence to determine the main argument of the curator for the entire exhibit.

**Elaborate:** Conduct a small or large class discussion with students before leaving the exhibit and allow them to compare notes. What do they believe the main argument is of this exhibition? What does the curator want visitors to know about the Spiro civilization? Be sure to connect the conversation to the Essential Question for the lesson: **How do curators and historians build an argument?** Let students know this discussion will continue when they return to their classroom.

## After your visit

**Evaluate:** Upon returning to the classroom, remind students or post on the board the statement: “Every exhibition is an argument” and facilitate a small or large class discussion utilizing student evidence sheets to determine the Spiro Mounds curatorial argument.

- Ask students to compare notes and utilize the Spiromounds.com to pull up images of the objects that students selected or allow students to share the pictures they took at the exhibit.
- Writing Option: Ask students to write individually or in groups a “curatorial statement” about the exhibit in which they identify the main argument and include descriptions of specific objects from the exhibit that best illustrate the Spiro people and their continuing culture. After they have written or discussed what they believe the curators argument to be, share with them this statement from the Spiro curator and compare their response:

The goal of exhibition is to share the history of the Spiro culture from its humble beginnings to its rise as one of the premier cultural sites in all of North America, and to highlight the enduring legacy of Native Americans today who are descended from Mississippian cultural groups.

- Multiple modalities: Ask students to utilize the Spiro website (spiromounds.com) to curate their own mini-exhibit utilizing the objects they selected during their visit. If they could only choose five objects for their mini-exhibit, what would they be and what argument would they be making? Students can utilize a number of online apps to design their exhibit and include a justification for their choices.
- Be sure to connect the conversation to the Essential Question for the lesson: **How do curators and historians build an argument?** Remind students that curators, like historians, use primary sources to construct an argument. The act of curating or writing history is always a series of choices on the part of the historian or the curator. A great follow up assignment to encourage further thinking about the role of the curator/historian is to ask learners to curate their textbooks or another selection of primary source documents, like a Document Based Question assignment. What objects/events made it into the textbook and what objects/events did not? This can provide a rich opportunity to talk about the role of individual choices in how historical stories are told.

# Handout A

## Curating the Classroom

Select four objects that best represent daily life in this classroom OR four objects that best represent your daily life. In each of the squares below, sketch the item and write a one sentence reason for why that object is a good choice. At the bottom of the page, write a curatorial statement about why these objects were good representations.

<p><b>Object 1 Sketch</b></p>         <p><b>Why is it a good choice:</b></p> _____  _____	<p><b>Object 2 Sketch</b></p>         <p><b>Why is it a good choice:</b></p> _____  _____
<p><b>Object 3 Sketch</b></p>         <p><b>Why is it a good choice:</b></p> _____  _____	<p><b>Object 4 Sketch</b></p>         <p><b>Why is it a good choice:</b></p> _____  _____

Use the space below to write a brief curatorial statement that explains why these objects best represent the classroom space.  
Be sure to use the objects as evidence for your argument.

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# Handout B

## Curating the Exhibition

Your task at *Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World* is to explore each of the four sections and identify one or two objects in each section that best represent the Spiro culture and people. Sketch the objects and write down why you believe that object best captures the curators argument for that section. Be ready to put all four sections together to determine the main curatorial argument for the entire exhibit.

<p><b>Section 1:</b> <b>Mississippian World</b></p> <p>Why it supports the curators argument:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p><b>Section 2:</b> <b>Site and Ceremony</b></p> <p>Why it supports the curators argument:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p><b>Section 3:</b> <b>Archaeology and Looting</b></p> <p>Why it supports the curators argument:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p><b>Section 4:</b> <b>Cultural Continuation</b></p> <p>Why it supports the curators argument:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

Use the space below to write what you believe is the main curatorial argument of *Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World*. Be sure to use the objects you have selected as evidence for your argument.

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*Spiro and the Art of the  
Mississippian World*

# **Exhibition Related Programming**

**February 12 – May 9, 2021**



## Adult Programs

### Read the West Book Club:

#### Looting Spiro Mounds: An American King Tut's Tomb

February 21 • 1:00 – 2:15 p.m.

When a group of relic hunters drove their picks into a lost Indian burial crypt in eastern Oklahoma in 1935, they unearthed a vast treasure trove of Mississippian art — considered by many at the time to be America's answer to King Tut's tomb. They also ignited a controversy that reverberates throughout archaeological and American Indian communities. In *Looting Spiro Mounds*, David La Vere takes readers behind the scenes of this discovery to re-create a Great Depression-era archaeological adventure worthy of Indiana Jones.

Read the West Book Club meets in January, February and March; attend one or all three. Select books available for purchase in The Museum Store (15% discount for Museum members). Refreshments provided. \$9, \$6 for Museum members. Register by February 18 at [nationalcowboymuseum.org/event/read-the-west-book-club-looting-spiro-mounds](https://nationalcowboymuseum.org/event/read-the-west-book-club-looting-spiro-mounds)

### Brown Bag Lunch Series

Thursdays, March 4 – May 6 • Noon – 1:00 p.m.

Take a break from your day and enjoy a series of virtual presentations over the lunch hour, Thursdays, March 4 – May 6. Hear subject experts discuss various topics related to the National Cowboy Museum Exhibition *Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World*. Register at [nationalcowboymuseum.org/event/brown-bag-lunch-series-exploring-spiro-and-the-art-of-the-mississippian-world](https://nationalcowboymuseum.org/event/brown-bag-lunch-series-exploring-spiro-and-the-art-of-the-mississippian-world)

#### March 4

##### Exploring Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World

The Spiro people are nearly forgotten in the pages of North American history, yet they created one of the most exceptional societies in all of the Americas. Eric Singleton, Curator of Ethnology, National Cowboy Museum, will explore the archaeological and historical data connecting the Spiro site to other communities throughout North and Central America. Learn about the Spiroan community, their religious activities and the enduring legacy of Native Americans today who are descended from Mississippian cultural groups. This is a virtual event. The program is free, but registration is required. Login information will be sent prior to the event. Register by March 3.

#### March 11

##### Spiro and its Rock Art Connections

Images found in the art of Spiro Mounds is also seen in the rock art of Missouri. In this presentation, Dr. Carol Diaz-Granados, Archaeologist and Research Associate in the Department of Anthropology, Washington University, compares the widespread symbols depicted on Spiro shell, copper, clay and stone to imagery in Missouri petroglyphs and pictographs – including its fascinating cave art. The motifs reflect American Indian oral traditions, especially a widespread genesis story. This is a virtual event. The program is free, but registration is required. Login information will be sent prior to the event. Register by March 10.

#### March 18

##### The Ouachita Connection: Novaculite Arrow Points at Spiro

Objects placed in the Craig Mound at Spiro represented material ties to the wider social and sacred worlds of the 15th century American Southeast. Most of the arrow points can be sourced to the Ozark

Mountains to the northeast of Spiro, or to the Ouachita Mountains and the Red River valley to the south. In this talk, Mary Beth Trubitt, Archeologist for the Arkansas Archeological Survey and a Research Professor in the Department of Anthropology, University of Arkansas, highlights current research on Arkansas novaculite, and how archeologists can use this toolstone to track interactions – movements of people and their materials – between Caddoan communities in the Ouachita Mountains and the Spiro site in the Arkansas River valley. This is a virtual event. The program is free, but registration is required. Login information will be sent prior to the event. Register by March 17.

### **March 25**

#### **Adventures of the Mound Boys: The Looting of Craig Mound and WPA Archaeology at Spiro**

In 1935, a group of hard-up treasure hunters known as the Pocola Mining Company started an organized campaign to loot the Craig Mound at the Spiro site and sell off the spoils. The looters unwittingly stumbled into destroying the largest and best-preserved cache of pre-contact Native American art north of the Rio Grande. When the details of their finds began to leak out, the University of Oklahoma (OU) began a successful campaign to stop the destruction. After the looters were forced off the land, four young archaeologists from OU were tasked with supervising dozens of untrained field workers to excavate what was left of this incredible find. Dr. Amanda Regnier, Director of the Oklahoma Archeological Survey at the University of Oklahoma, will share the Craig Mound looting story, the battle to save the site and the adventures of the Work Projects Administration archaeologists in Depression-era eastern Oklahoma. This is a virtual event. The program is free, but registration is required. Login information will be sent prior to the event. Register by March 24.

### **April 1**

#### **The Spirit Lodge: Spiro's Claim to Distinction in Ancient History**

The fabled “hollow chamber” contained a spiritually charged construction called the Spirit Lodge. It occupied the heart of the main cone of Spiro's Craig Mound. The story of the discovery of this unique building and its destruction by relic miners during the summer of 1935, is primarily a cautionary tale of the great loss of what might have been had better circumstances prevailed. Meticulous reconstruction opens a window into Native American beliefs and practices of a bygone era that partially recovers the loss to us. It contributes to our understanding of the importance of an ancient appeal to spiritual action that took place around 1400 CE. Presented by James A. Brown, Professor Emeritus, Northwestern University. This is a virtual event. The program is free, but registration is required. Login information will be sent prior to the event. Register by March 31.

### **April 8**

#### **Mississippian Magical Theatrics at Spiro**

Mississippian visitors to Spiro arrived from various areas of the Midwest and Southeast over some three centuries, carting with them sacred objects and treasures. These ritual practitioners left various forms of exotic weaponry whose purpose has remained largely unknown. In this presentation, David H. Dye, Professor of Archaeology in the Department of Earth Sciences at the University of Memphis, will argue that these weapons constituted central props for ritual theatrics that showcased mortal combat and requickening of the dead. This is a virtual event. The program is free, but registration is required. Login information will be sent prior to the event. Register by April 7.

### **April 15**

#### **The Arkansas Valley Traditions of Spiro**

Spiro is best known for the creation of the Spirit Lodge around AD 1400. Patrick Livingood, Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Oklahoma, will describe how the Spirit Lodge is a culmination of 500 years of tradition at Spiro and the Arkansas Valley. This is a virtual event. The program is free, but registration is required. Login information will be sent prior to the event. Register by April 14.

**April 22**

**Cognitive Approaches to the Analysis of Mississippian Craig-Style Gorgets**

The iconography of Mississippian Shell Gorgets (primarily rendered in the Craig A style) reveals structured compositions that appear to be narrative vignettes reflecting ritual activity centered on a cosmological focus. Presented by F. Kent Reilly, Director, Center for the Study of Arts and Symbolism of Ancient America, Texas State University. This is a virtual event. The program is free, but registration is required. Login information will be sent prior to the event. Register by April 21.

**April 29**

**Woven Worlds: The Archaeology of the Textiles and Basketry of the Mississippian World**

In this presentation, Elizabeth T. Horton, Ph.D., paleoethnobotanist and archaeologist, explores what is known about the fabric traditions and technologies of weavers at Spiro Mounds as well as the broader Southeastern United States. She discusses the critical role fabrics and fiber plants played in the social lives and economies of the indigenous peoples in the Mississippian Period, and the unique insights perishable material culture provides us in understanding the past. This is a virtual event. The program is free, but registration is required. Login information will be sent prior to the event. Register by April 28.

**May 6**

**Eternal Performances: Spirit Tableaus in Ancient Mesoamerica**

The Craig Mound Lodge is a tableau of powerful living spirit forces. The people of Teotihuacan in the Valley of Mexico, and the people of the lowland Maya world to the east of them, also created tableaus that were eternal performances. David Freidel, Maya archaeologist and professor of anthropology at Washington University, has discovered and documented such performances in Yucatan and northwestern Guatemalan projects. He reviews some of what is known about the beliefs and practices of ancient Mesoamericans through their tableaus in offerings and tombs. This is a virtual event. The program is free, but registration is required. Login information will be sent prior to the event. Register by May 5.

## **Sunday Spiro Spotlight**

**March 7, April 11, 25 and May 9 • 1:00 – 1:30 p.m.**

Grab a stool and listen to invited artisans discuss their craft. Artists will showcase their artistic heritage and highlight the continuity of cultural traditions. From there venture into the galleries and enjoy the exhibition at your own pace. Free for members or with Museum admission.

**March 7**

**Margaret Wheeler**

An award-winning weaver, Margaret Wheeler balances fashion with art, using modern technology to help her with the ancient pastime of weaving. Her Chickasaw heritage influences the look and feel of her weavings, which may eventually adorn mannequins and customers. A President's Award recipient at Red Earth Festival and an inductee into the Chickasaw Hall of Fame, Wheeler will share about her pieces included in the Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World exhibition.

**April 11**

**Jereldine Redcorn**

Jereldine Redcorn is recognized nationally and internationally for reviving Caddo Pottery. Her designs are especially inspired by prehistoric Native American decorative motifs from the Spiro Mounds. Her bottle "Intertwining Scrolls" was selected by President Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama for



permanent display in the White House Oval Office. A self-taught artist, Redcorn imbues each piece with her own aesthetic; while many of her vessels bear traceable references to motifs and pottery styles found in the archaeological record, they are uniquely modern creations. Join Redcorn as she shares about her pieces included in the Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World exhibition.

**April 25**

**Anita Fields**

Artist Anita Fields creates works of clay and textile that reflect the worldview of her Native Osage culture. Field's practice explores the complexities of cultural influences and the intersections of balance and chaos. Her art creates narratives that asks viewers to consider other ways of seeing and being in an effort to understand our shared existence. Landscapes, environment and the influences of nature are themes found throughout the work of Anita Fields. Currently a 2017–2020 fellow with the Kaiser Foundation Tulsa Artist Fellowship, Fields will share about her pieces included in the Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World exhibition.

**May 9**

**Martha Berry**

Martha Berry is a Cherokee beadwork artist who creates beaded art inspired by traditional Southeastern Woodlands Native American Indians. Her beadwork often illustrates the stories and lore of her Cherokee ancestors, allowing the observer to experience the power of their knowledge and the richness of their experience. Designated a Cherokee National Living Treasure by the Cherokee Nation for traditional Cherokee beadwork, Berry will share about her pieces included in the Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World exhibition.

## **Read the West Book Club: The Freshour Cylinders**

**March 21 • 1:00 – 2:15 p.m.**

Winner of an American Book Award, this suspenseful literary mystery takes place during the events surrounding the discovery and destruction of Spiro Mound, the most significant pre-Columbian temple mound ever found in North America. Weaving history with the compelling story of murder, broken hearts and greed, Speer Morgan provides an engrossing and suspenseful tale.

Read the West Book Club meets in January, February and March; attend one or all three. *The Freshour Cylinders* is available on Amazon or Ebay. Refreshments provided. \$9, \$6 for Museum members. Register by March 18 at [nationalcowboymuseum.org/event/read-the-west-book-club-the-freshour-cylinders](https://nationalcowboymuseum.org/event/read-the-west-book-club-the-freshour-cylinders)

## **Native American Art, Ritual and Cosmic Renewal Looting & Archeology Panel: Its Effects on Native People and Culture**

**May 7 • Noon – 1:00 p.m. • Virtual**

Much of what is understood about the Spiro site comes only in bits and pieces. This site remains the location of one of the largest and longest episodes of looting at any American archaeological site in history. Spread across the world, many, if not most, of these items will likely never be returned. It is critical to discuss the legacy of Native peoples and connect it to present-day communities. Showcasing their artistic heritage and highlighting the continuity of cultural traditions also reinforces the United States' greatest strength — its diversity. Highlighting diversity facilitates the introduction of new ideas and perspectives and bridges cultural differences that exist in a nation composed of a multiplicity of people from across the globe. This is a virtual event. The program is free, but registration is required. You will be sent login information prior to event. Register by May 6 at [nationalcowboymuseum.org/event/looting-archeology-panel](https://nationalcowboymuseum.org/event/looting-archeology-panel).

**Invited Speakers**



- **Moderator:** Justin B. Giles, (Muscogee-Creek) Staff Curator – Museum Management Program, Bureau of Indian Affairs
- **Panelists:**
  - Scott Hammerstedt, Senior Researcher, Oklahoma Archeological Survey, University of Oklahoma
  - George Sabo, III, Director AR Archaeological Survey, Archeology Teaching & Research Faculty, University of Arkansas, Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences, Anthropology
  - Tamara Francis, Chairman, Caddo Nation of Oklahoma
  - Tribal Representative TBA

## Artist Demonstrations

**May 8 • 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.**

Explore artist demonstration stations and learn more about traditional and contemporary native craft. Participating artists include: Martha Berry, Cherokee Beadwork Artist; Jereldine Redcorn, Caddo Potter; Margaret Roach Wheeler, Chickasaw/Choctaw weaver and Native American fashion designer; Matthew Anderson, Cherokee shell carver.

## Educator Programs

### ***Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World Virtual Teacher Workshop***

**February 27 • 9:00 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.**

Join the National Cowboy Museum for a professional development opportunity for teachers grades K – 12 in collaboration with the College of Education and Professional Studies, University of Central Oklahoma.

*Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World* is the first major museum exhibition on the Spiro Mounds of southeast Oklahoma. It reunites extraordinary objects which haven't been together since the site was both looted and archeologically excavated in the 1930s and 40s.

Explore the religious and ceremonial activities, farming and hunting practices and daily life of the Spiro people. Learn how a "Little Ice Age" may have led to the site's ultimate abandonment and what lessons may be learned as we face our own ecological changes today. The exhibition also showcases contemporary Indigenous art pieces that explore the ideas of origin and connect the art and artistry of the Spiro people to their modern descendants.

More than a decade in the making, this 200-object exhibition with companion publication and symposium series were developed in collaboration with the Caddo Nation, the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes, and scholars from over a dozen universities and museums from across the United States.

Participants engage with content expert Eric Singleton, PhD, Curator of Ethnology at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum and leave with practical teaching strategies.

#### **Participating teachers receive:**

- *Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World* Exhibition Catalog, valued at \$55
- *Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World* Teaching Packet
- 20% teacher discount on one item at The Museum Store and online

- (Materials will be picked up at the Visitor Services Desk in the Museum lobby; you will be notified when available.)

This is a virtual event. The program is free, but registration is required. You will be sent login information prior to event. Register by February 25 at [nationalcowboymuseum.org/event/spiro-and-the-art-of-the-mississippian-world-teacher-workshop-elementary](https://nationalcowboymuseum.org/event/spiro-and-the-art-of-the-mississippian-world-teacher-workshop-elementary)

## **Educators After Hours: Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World** **March 11 • 5:30 – 8:30 p.m.**

Socialize after hours during a free K – 12 professional development session at the National Cowboy Museum. Eric Singleton, Curator of Ethnology at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum and curator of Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World, leads educators on a tour of the exhibit, which reunites extraordinary objects which haven't been together since the site was both looted and archeologically excavated in the 1930s and 40s.

### **Participants will:**

- Explore Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World with exhibit curator Eric Singleton and other content experts
- Investigate Museum collections and exhibits
- Obtain 2.5 hours of professional development

### **Participating teachers receive:**

- Museum admission for the event
- Refreshments
- Time to socialize with other Oklahoma educators

This event is free; however, a registration deposit of \$10, which will be refunded to all attending, is due at time of enrollment. Educators select a field trip date at time of enrollment. Current K – 12 educators and student teachers only. Register by March 4 at [nationalcowboymuseum.org/event/educators-after-hours-spiro-and-the-art-of-the-mississippian-world](https://nationalcowboymuseum.org/event/educators-after-hours-spiro-and-the-art-of-the-mississippian-world).

**Depending on the current state of the public health crisis, this event may be held virtually.**

## **Family Programs**

### **Spiro and the Art of the Mississippi World Family Space** **February 12 – May 9, 2021 • Museum Hours**

The Family Space is designed to help visitors explore a rich culture focusing on universal concepts of community, diversity, and artistry. It takes learners into the culture and history of Native Americans through dramatic scenes and stories, a reading nook, weaving activities, pottery puzzle and programming to teach kids through activities to do on their own, or as a family.

#### **Family Reading Nook**

Learning outcome: Develop a community of readers; harness the power of storytelling to understand about different cultures.

**Wall label/signage with directions:**

**Reading Nook for Young and Old**

Take a moment, or a few, to sit and relax while exploring more in depth about Spiro Mounds. Engage with your family and friends using the assembled books for both children and adults. Encourage young minds to learn about the Spiroan culture and legacy and discover a people who were not so different from people today.

**Weaving Stations**

Learning outcome: Ignite creativity and imagination by creating designs using different types of weaving styles.

**Wall label/signage with directions:**

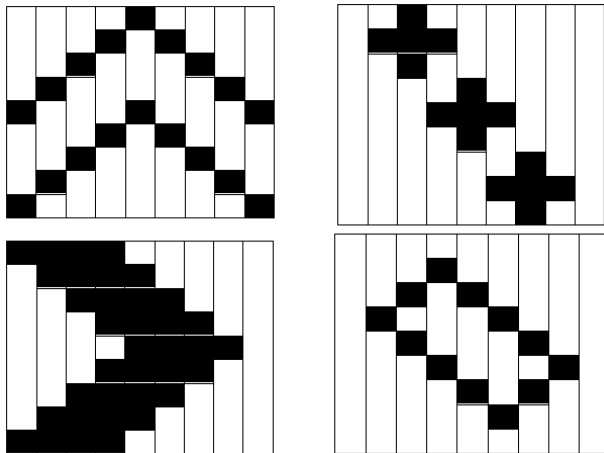
**FLAT WEAVING**

Did you notice Basketry Mat by Mary E. Smith in the exhibition?



Locate the image on the wall for inspiration and try your hand at flat weaving. Attach the webbing to the frame using Velcro to create a variety of woven patterns.

**Can you create the following designs?**



**What other designs can you create?**

## **BASKET WEAVING**

Did you notice Black Brown White Basket with the eye-dazzler pattern by Jessica Thomas in the exhibition?



Locate the image on the wall for inspiration and try your hand at basket weaving. Use the various strips of textiles to layer and weave a unique pattern on the basket frame. What designs can you create?

## **Pottery Puzzle**

Learning outcome: Enhance cognitive function, improve visual-spatial reasoning, encourage critical thinking, decrease stress levels, and improve your mood!

**Wall label/signage with directions:**

### **POTTERY PUZZLE**

Did you notice Wyandot Reemergence, by Richard Zane Smith in the exhibition?

Locate the image on the wall for inspiration and try your hand reassembling the pot.



## **Discover More Mound Communities**

Learning outcome: Discover other mound communities, their cultural traditions and understand similarities and differences among them.

**Wall label/signage with directions:**

### **CAHOKIA CEREMONIAL CENTER**

The largest Mississippian ceremonial center known today is Cahokia. Located just outside St. Louis, Missouri, this city had a population of 10,000 to 20,000 people, contained nearly 200 earthen mounds, and covered five square miles.

Cahokia was likely the epicenter of an artistic tradition referred to as Braden. Braden is a highly refined artistic style known for its representation of Morning Star and Earthmother as well as its depictions of plants, animals, and humans with references to body painting and tattooing. Objects

created in this style are found at other large ceremonial centers across the eastern half of North America—including Moundville in Alabama, Etowah in Georgia, and Spiro in Oklahoma.

**Select from the videos to learn more about Cahokia:**

- Before Columbus
- Mark of the Mississippians
- Project Arch-ae-o
- Digging Up the Past
- City of the Sun
- Meet the Team
- Ancient Architects
- Gods and Heroes

Provided courtesy of Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site, Collinsville, IL.

**Virtual Reality Experiences**

Learning outcome: Increase engagement through virtual reality experience; motivate to learn with use of technology; and use visualization to better understand concepts.

**Wall label/signage with directions:**

**EXPLORE SPIRO**

Use the VR headset below to explore Spiro.

This experience was developed by the University of Arkansas' Arkansas Stories series – which uses objects and places as focal points to narrate compelling stories.

**STAR SERACH**

Many of the symbols from Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World feature celestial images that can be seen in our night sky.

Use the headset below to search the virtual planetarium to find the following astronomical representations.

**Kids Take Over the Cowboy – Spiro Scratch Art:  
Decorations for Another World**

**March 6 • 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**

Many of the artifacts found in the Spiro Mounds are heavily decorated, often by incising, or cutting, a design into the stone or clay or shell. Using Spiro iconography as inspiration, scratch your own designs into a variety of objects. Enjoy storytime at 10:30 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. Free for members or with Museum admission. Available while supplies last.

**Spring Break Drop-In Activities**

**March 15 – 19 • 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.**

Spiro Mounds afforded researchers a treasure trove of Mississippian material culture. It was full of pottery, woven textiles, incised shells, beaded clothing and many more examples of Native art and craftsmanship. During Spring Break try your hand at similar crafts. Drop by and participate in family-friendly activities and create a different make-and-take craft each day. No reservations required.

Activities are available while supplies last. Free for Museum members or with Museum admission.

**Monday, March 15: Constructing Home**

There are many kinds of homes. In Liichokoskomo' there are examples of six different types of Native American dwellings. Use building bricks, paper and other materials to recreate some of these dwellings. Then, try designing your own home!

**Tuesday, March 16: Figurative Clay**

In the Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World exhibition you will see many examples of figures like people and animals made of clay and stone. Use clay to make your own figurine.

**Wednesday, March 17: Twining**

The art of twining is an old style of Cherokee textile weaving using twine made from tree bark or other plant fibers to make bags or clothing. Try a twining craft with Cherokee National Treasure in Textiles, Tonia Weavel.

**Thursday, March 18: Scratch Art Gorgets**

Shell gorgets are a Native American art form of polished, carved shell pendants worn around the neck. The gorgets are frequently engraved and are sometimes highlighted with paint. Make your own scratch art gorget.

**Friday, March 19: Paper Plate Weaving**

Many of the baskets you see in the Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World exhibition are made from reeds and other plant fibers. Come weave one of your own using a paper plate and yarn!

## **Kids Take Over the Cowboy – Colors of Nature**

**April 3 • 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**

Spiro Mounds contained the largest assemblage of often brightly colored textiles and had chambers with colorfully painted walls. Just as we use chemicals to make dyes to color clothes and textiles today, so did historic peoples. However, they used a variety of natural materials like plants and fruits to add color and adornment. Join us as we dye cloth using natural materials. Enjoy storytime at 10:30 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. Free for members or with Museum admission. Activities available while supplies last.



# ANCIENT MYSTERIES REVEALED

# SPIRO

AND THE ART OF THE MISSISSIPPIAN WORLD

## Exhibition Puzzle

Solve the puzzle to reveal an important message from the exhibition curator, Eric Singleton!

### Directions:

- Find the indicated words in each section of the exhibition and put them together at the end to reveal the message.
  - In each section, find the text panels indicated. For each one you will be given groups of numbers to find the words.
    - Each group of three numbers will tell you
      - (1) which paragraph the word is in,
      - (2) which line in that paragraph the word is in and
      - (3) which word in that line is the one you are looking for.
- (1) (2) (3)  
PARAGRAPH, LINE, WORD
- Once you have found all the words, record them in the numbered spaces on the back of this page to reveal the important message.

### For Example:

Find the **Mississippian People** text panel:

① 2, 5, 5

## The Mississippian People

### Paragraph 1

The Mississippian people (ad 800–1650) were the largest and most complex society to develop in the eastern half of North America. Living near rivers in the Midwest and Southeast, they created highly developed, agriculturally based communities that were mostly fortified and contained large earthen mounds and broad plazas.

### Paragraph 2

Line 1 These towns and cities were the center of  
 Line 2 political, social, and ceremonial life in this  
 Line 3 period. Like many other cultures in the world,  
 Line 4 the Mississippians had a ranked society, which  
 Line 5 included commoners, warriors, ritual elite, and  
 Line 6 chiefs. These chiefs were often considered godlike  
 Line 7 by their people, sometimes referred to as the Sun.

Word 1 Word 2 Word 3 Word 4 Word 5

### Paragraph 3

The economic basis for most of the Mississippian centers was the harvesting of flora (plants) and fauna (animals). Corn, or maize, was the dominant crop, but other plants, whether grown or gathered, such as beans, squash, sump weed, acorns, and sunflowers, played an important role. This plant-based diet was supplemented with large and small game, such as bison, deer, and rabbit, as well as fish.

elite

③

⑤

④

①

②



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 Exhibition support provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, Henry Luce Foundation and the Kirkpatrick Foundation.



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## The Mississippian People

Find the **Mississippian People** text panel:

①      4      5      12      = **Still**  
Paragraph      Line      Word

Find the **Etowah (Georgia)** text panel:

②      1, 1, 5

Find the **A Native American Navy** text panel:

③      3, 2, 2

Find the **Native American Art** text panel:

④      1, 1, 6

Find the **Styles From Different Regions** text panel:

⑤      3, 4, 12

Find the **Styles From Different Regions** text panel:

⑥      1, 2, 10

## The Little Ice Age

Find the **Little Ice Age** text panel:

⑦      2, 5, 3

Find the **Spirit Lodge: Ritual Revival of the World** text panel:

⑧      2, 1, 10

## Archaeology and Looting

Find the **Looting of Spiro** text panel:

⑨      4, 5, 5

Find the **Archaeology at Spiro** text panel:

⑩      4, 3, 5

## Cultural Continuation

Find the **MONOLITHIC AXE (P-I-TA-U-NI-WAN'-HA – TO HAVE POWER)** by Wayne "Tay Sha" Earles (Caddo):

⑪      1, 5, 13

Find the **art statement next to the EVERLASTING FIRE PLATE** by Chase Earles and Starr Hardridge:

⑫      1, 8, 2

Find the **artist statement next to the DRAGON FLY POT** by Karin Walkingstick:

⑬      5, 14, 3

Find the **artist statement next to RIVER OF ART** by Martha Berry:

⑭      1, 4, 3

Find the **artist statement next to EVERYTHING BELONGS** by Erin Shaw:

⑮      2, 6, 4

⑭

⑫

③

⑤

②

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⑨

①

⑧

⑮

⑪

⑦

⑥

⑬

⑩

**Still**

## Classes

### **Cherokee Beadwork**

**March 6 • 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.**

Learn about beadwork methods used by Cherokees in the mid-1700s. Students will create a purse (approximately 4" x 4") utilizing the two-needle applique stitch and edge beading. Suitable for beginners to advanced. Led by Cherokee National Treasure Tonia Hogner-Weavel, who has taught Cherokee beadwork for the past 10 years. All supplies provided, limited enrollment. \$50; \$40 for Museum members. Register online by February 26 at [nationalcowboymuseum.org/event/cherokee-beadwork](http://nationalcowboymuseum.org/event/cherokee-beadwork).

### **Traditional Caddo Pottery Techniques**

**April 24 • 1:00 – 5:00 p.m.**

Learn a brief history of the Caddo tribe, original to Oklahoma and the Red River area, as well as the ancient and ancestral techniques they employed to create some of the most beautiful, technical and widespread pottery in prehistoric and historic North America. Participants will be instructed on making traditional clay, hand coiling their own pots and finishing techniques. There will also be a discussion about firing techniques. An additional firing day may be scheduled in coordination with instructor.

Taught by renowned Caddo potter Chase Kahwinhut Earles. All supplies provided; limited enrollment. \$60; \$50 for Museum members. Register online by April 16 at [nationalcowboymuseum.org/event/traditional-caddo-pottery-techniques](http://nationalcowboymuseum.org/event/traditional-caddo-pottery-techniques).



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**Exhibition sponsorship provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, Henry Luce Foundation and the Kirkpatrick Foundation.**

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**With a special thanks to**



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