



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

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**GROUNDBREAKING SPIRO EXHIBITION AT THE NATIONAL COWBOY & WESTERN  
HERITAGE MUSEUM AWARDED \$400,000  
NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES GRANT**

**OKLAHOMA CITY, OK** – The National Endowment for the Humanities' (NEH) has awarded a \$400,000 grant to support the exhibition "Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World" at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum. The first major presentation on the Spiro Mounds ever undertaken by a museum, the exhibition will share the art, history and culture of the Spiro people, representing the first, and possibly last, time these artifacts will be reunited from various collections across the country.

The exhibition will include approximately 200 objects and will debut at National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum February 12 - May 16, 2021, before traveling to the Birmingham Museum of Art and then to the Dallas Museum of Art.

The Spiro Mounds in Oklahoma are one of the United States' most important ancient Native American sites, yet the Spiro people are nearly forgotten in the pages of history books, despite creating one of the most sophisticated ancient cultures. It is believed that the Spiroan people, along with other Mississippian groups across the eastern half of North America, created a world equal to that of the Aztec, Maya or Inca, consisting of trade networks and highly developed social, political and religious centers. During the 1930s, commercial and academic excavations revealed the Spiro site contained one of the greatest collections of prehistoric American Indian artifacts ever discovered in the United States.

This exhibition will include the reunification of a range of items looted and archaeologically excavated at Spiro that have not been together since the early 1930s and 1940s. Embossed copper plates, wooden sculptures, thousands of pearls and beads, large human effigy pipes and engraved shell gorgets and cups are just some of the things that were housed at Spiro. In fact, nearly 90% of all known engraved shell created during the Mississippian period (900 – 1650 AD) was discovered at this one site.

"The quality and quantity of material found in Spiro is unprecedented," said Eric Singleton, Ph.D., Museum Curator of Ethnology. "We are grateful to have the support of the Spiroan descendants, the Caddo Nation and the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes, as we work on this exhibition. Without them, this exhibition would not be possible."

The grant was approved through NEH's public humanities projects program, which supports projects that bring the ideas and insights of the humanities to life for general audiences through in-person programming. Projects must engage humanities scholarship to analyze significant themes in disciplines such as history, literature, ethics and art history.

"We are extremely grateful to be awarded a highly competitive and prestigious National Endowment for the Humanities' grant in support of our Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World exhibition and publication," said Museum President & CEO Natalie Shirley. "The uniqueness and vast social importance of Spiro needs to be shared with the world, and the support and generosity of the National Endowment for the Humanities' will help make that possible."

**The Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World has been made possible in part by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities: Exploring the human endeavor**

***Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this press release, do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.***

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### **About the Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World exhibition**

Spiro Mounds in LeFlore County, Oklahoma are one of America's most important, but little-known, ancient cultural and religious centers. Between 1250 and 1400, Spiro became the most significant ancient Mississippian community north of the Valley of Mexico before it was abandoned around 1450. This exhibit will connect the Spiro site and its people to other communities throughout North and Central America, and offer an interpretation into the nature of their community, religious activities, farming and hunting practices, and daily life. This exhibit will include approximately 200 objects and will debut at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum February 12 - May 16, 2021 before traveling to the Birmingham Museum of Art and then to the Dallas Museum of Art.

### **About the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum**

The National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City is America's premier institution of Western history, art and culture. Founded in 1955, the Museum collects, preserves and exhibits an internationally renowned collection of Western art and artifacts while sponsoring dynamic educational programs to stimulate interest in the enduring legacy of the American West. For more information, visit [nationalcowboymuseum.org](http://nationalcowboymuseum.org).