

Nebraska Geographic

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Whenever I am traveling across the rolling landscape canvas of Nebraska, I always intentionally plan a little time to visit art galleries along my route. After many years of wandering, I continue to be amazed by the artistic abilities of my fellow Nebraskans. Here is a brief smattering of Nebraska art galleries that I hope you will check out during your travels.

I met the founder of **Red Path Gallery & Tasting Room** in Seward while on a college visit with my daughter years ago. Jeanne Wiemer, who started the attraction with her husband, Verle, invited me to her downtown gallery located on the north side of the ornate town square in Seward, so I stopped by next time I was in town. She promised Nebraska art and wine. No arm twisting was necessary.

My most recent visit was earlier this spring. Before I could even make it to the serving area I was inundated with art. The long hallway of this former bank building, erected in 1886, was covered with framed pieces. Around the corner is a small gallery, probably once the office of a bank executive. Down the hall is a rack of cigar box guitars built by a local man. Past the bar is the original bank vault, and a larger room with tables and chairs where patrons can converse and contemplate the artwork. Red Path's new owners are keeping the creative fire burning. The building includes stately oak floors, mosaic tile, Missouri marble – itself a work of art.

Main Street Gallery in North Loup is also located in a former bank. Bud and Betty Carlson started the gallery in 2013 as the home of the local Artisimos art club. The art wedged into this small structure includes watercolors and other paintings, canvas photographs, sculpture, pottery, textiles, books by area authors, handmade jewelry, gift items, and more.

Back in 2017 I judged a show at Main Street Gallery, having to choose 10 pieces to move on to the Association of Nebraska Art Clubs annual show. My head hurt after having to pick winners from all the high-quality art. North Loup is known as the Popcorn Capital of the World. If you're in the area, I suggest popping in to this quaint, small-town gallery.

I've known **Wildflower Gallery** founder Carol Hines for more than 20 years. In the summer of 2022 she bought a 70-year-old building in downtown Wood River and began restoring it. She opened her gallery by March 2023 as Sandhill cranes were returning to the Platte River. Those big gray birds are featured in some of the

art here created by Hines. Other artists are featured. When I finally stopped by in June, paintings, drawings, framed photos, jewelry, and handcrafted wooden pieces were among the works on display. On the exterior of the building's east wall, a colorful mural catches the eyes of passersby. Of course it was painted by Hines and features wildflowers and cranes.

Gallery 92 West is the home gallery of the Fremont Area Art Association. The organization traces its roots to when the original nine members of the Fremont Art Club first met in 1960. In 1979 the group bought the building in downtown Fremont and began a renovation which included having to remove vats of acid from the basement.

In 2013, I was invited to show a selection of my photographs at Gallery 92 West. Even though I was late for my own reception, the popularity of the exhibit led to it being extended. A recent expansion to an adjoining building has led to the creation of a state-of-the-art classroom, and Gallery 92 West now also features the Art Emporium, a street level shop where area artisans sell their creations. Art lovers can explore two floors of creativity at Gallery 92 West. In July, historical photos of Fremont are being shown.

From a small house in Thedford, the **Thedford Art Gallery** calls out to art lovers passing by on Nebraska Highway 2. This gallery run by volunteers contains a variety of very nice art. It overflows with scenes of the west: images of brandings, cattle, sunrises, sunsets, and Sandhills scenes, yucca plants, wildflowers, and wildlife. Years ago, one of the volunteers told me that "anything with a windmill on it will sell." And there is plenty of that. If they are not open, just call one of the phone numbers taped to the front door.

Just down Highway 2 a bit, a few miles into the Mountain Time Zone, the **Mullen Arts Center** provides a reason to stop and check out Mullen, the only incorporated community in Hooker County. Like Thedford, there is a lot of nice Sandhills art at Mullen Arts Center. It is open 10am to 4pm Tuesday through Saturday and is often abuzz with art workshops, book signings, and other community events. Fresh baked goods for sale are a bonus to broadening your horizons by checking out the art. For the people involved, this gallery is a labor of love.

In northeast Nebraska, the **Norfolk Arts Center** showcases talented creators in Johnny Carson's boyhood hometown. Exhibits rotate through the main gallery. The NAC's Fresh Fridays events invite everyone to come down to try their hand at stand-up comedy, poetry, or other open mic events. Or people can simply see what

other people are creating. There is no charge to attend. The center's annual juried show is in March and April.

Earlier this spring the **Prairie Art Center** in North Platte hosted a monthlong exhibit of my photography from the Sandhills. The stately building was completed in 1913 in the Italian Renaissance Revival architectural style to serve as the community's Federal Building. There are only 18 buildings of this style in all of Nebraska. The Creativity Unlimited Arts Council purchased the building in 2008 and opened the basement/studio level in 2013 in celebration of the building's 100th anniversary. Every level of the three-story structure is in use today. In addition to featuring regional art – and the Ted Long Legacy Room that appears as the art studio cabin of the international artist – the PAC is also a popular venue for wedding receptions, rehearsals, luncheons, and corporate events.

The **Museum of Nebraska Art** in Kearney has long been one of the best galleries in Nebraska. It was born in the 1970s, the vision of several art faculty members from what was then Kearney State College. The Nebraska Art Collection began with less than 30 pieces. MONA opened in the former Kearney Post Office in 1986. Exploring this museum is like taking a trip through my writing career – I've written about so many Nebraska artists now that I often recognize their style when I am in Nebraska galleries. Having their work on display at MONA can be the artistic highlight of their career. The museum is undergoing a multi-year, multi-million-dollar expansion, with plans of reopening later in 2024. I can't wait.

The **Carnegie Arts Center** is housed in the former Alliance Public Library in Alliance. Each year, 19 exhibits rotate through its three galleries. One of the highlights of this attraction is actually outside of its stately walls, a sculpture garden that serves as the location of live music performances and other special events.

Artists displayed in this arts center can be local, regional, or from other states. From November 2025 to early January 2026, I will have approximately 45 canvas photographs on display at this Alliance landmark. I know that is a ways out, but I hope you'll add that to your calendar and consider visiting these galleries and others while out and about exploring Nebraska.

Safe travels – and watch for deer.