

Telfair Museums in Savannah

A guide to the art history architecture and visitor experience

Telfair Museums is not one museum but a group of three distinctive sites in Savannah's Historic District.

Together, Telfair Academy, the Jepson Center, and the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters present more than two centuries of fine art, contemporary creativity, architecture, and social history. A visit to all three provides a fuller understanding of Savannah than any one location can offer by itself.

History and significance

Telfair Museums was founded in 1883 through the bequest of Mary Telfair, a prominent Savannah philanthropist who left her family home and its furnishings to the Georgia Historical Society for use as a museum. The museum opened to the public in 1886. It is recognized as the oldest public art museum in the South and as the first art museum in the United States founded through the vision of a woman.

The organization now connects three centuries of Savannah life. Its historic buildings preserve the architecture and material culture of prominent families, while its collections and exhibitions broaden the story through American and European art, African American art, contemporary work, education, and community programs.

The three museum sites

Telfair Academy

Telfair Academy is the historic art museum and the original home of the Telfair family. Designed by English architect William Jay, the mansion was adapted for museum use in the 1880s. Its galleries combine nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American and European paintings, sculpture, decorative arts, and period rooms.

One of its most dramatic works is Julian Russell Story's 1888 painting *The Black Prince at Crecy*. The monumental canvas depicts the aftermath of the Battle of Crecy and reflects the theatrical scale and emotional storytelling of nineteenth-century academic history painting. The Academy is also home to the Bird Girl statue made famous by the cover of *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*.

Best for: Historic paintings, sculpture, period interiors, and visitors who want to see the artwork associated with Savannah's cultural heritage.

Address: 121 Barnard Street, Savannah, Georgia

Jepson Center and Telfair Childrens Art Museum

Opened in 2006, the Jepson Center is the contemporary counterpart to Telfair's historic properties. Its light-filled modern building hosts changing exhibitions, contemporary art, photography, educational programs, and community events. It also contains the Telfair Children's Art Museum, with interactive experiences designed to encourage creativity and learning.

Best for: Modern and contemporary art, rotating exhibitions, architecture, educational programs, and families with children.

Address: 207 West York Street, Savannah, Georgia

Owens Thomas House and Slave Quarters

Built in 1819 and also designed by William Jay, the Owens-Thomas House is one of the nation's finest surviving examples of English Regency architecture. The site interprets both the privileged lives of the wealthy families who occupied the mansion and the lives of the enslaved people whose labor sustained it.

The preserved slave quarters and their distinctive blue-painted ceiling are among the property's most important features. Guided tours examine architecture, domestic life, slavery, power, and the complicated relationships that shaped early nineteenth-century Savannah. The result is more than a house tour: it is an encounter with the city's beauty and its difficult history.

Best for: Architecture, early Savannah history, material culture, and a deeper understanding of slavery and domestic life.

Address: 124 Abercorn Street, Savannah, Georgia

How the sites compare

Museum	Primary focus	What makes it distinctive
Telfair Academy	Historic fine art and period interiors	A historic mansion displaying major paintings, sculpture, decorative arts, the Bird Girl, and The Black Prince at Crecy.
Jepson Center	Contemporary art and family learning	A modern building with changing exhibitions, educational programs, and the Telfair Children's Art Museum.
Owens-Thomas House	Architecture and social history	A guided historic-house experience examining wealth, domestic life, enslavement, and early Savannah.

Recommended visit order

For a first visit, begin at the Owens-Thomas House in the morning because its guided tour requires the most planning. Walk through Savannah's squares to Telfair Academy, where you can explore at your own pace. Finish at the nearby Jepson Center, which provides a strong contemporary contrast to the historic sites.

1. Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters for the timed guided tour
2. Telfair Academy for historic art, period rooms, and The Black Prince at Crecy
3. Jepson Center for contemporary exhibitions and family activities

Visitor information

As of September 2026, one general admission ticket includes unlimited visits to all three sites for one week. The listed adult admission is \$30, with discounted senior admission available. The sites generally operate from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The Owens-Thomas House is visited by timed guided tour, with the final tour normally beginning at 4:00 p.m. Hours, prices, exhibitions, and tour availability can change, so confirm current details before visiting.

Official website: <https://www.telfair.org/>

Why Telfair is worth visiting

Telfair Museums is especially valuable because the three properties complement one another. Telfair Academy shows the art and interiors valued by prominent Savannah families. The Owens-Thomas House examines how that society functioned, including the lives and labor of enslaved people. The Jepson Center carries Savannah's creative story into the present. Together, they offer a thoughtful and unusually complete introduction to the city's art, architecture, and history.

Sources

- Telfair Museums, History of Telfair Museums, <https://www.telfair.org/about/history/>
- Telfair Museums, Our Three Museums, <https://www.telfair.org/our-three-museums/>
- Telfair Museums, Hours and Admission, <https://www.telfair.org/hours-admission/>
- Telfair Museums, Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters, <https://www.telfair.org/visit/owens-thomas/>
- Telfair Museums, Jepson Center and Telfair Children's Art Museum, <https://www.telfair.org/visit/jepson-center/>