

Photo By Bryan Stovall

A Century Renewed: The Torrey-West House Turns 100

In 2026, the Torrey-West House on Ossabaw Island reaches a remarkable milestone—one hundred years since its completion—and emerges from a comprehensive rehabilitation that ensures its future for generations to come.

Located on the north end of Ossabaw Island, the 20,000-square foot Mediterranean Revival residence was completed in 1926 as the winter home for the Torrey family of Grosse Pointe, Michigan. After decades of family use, the house became the home of the Ossabaw Island Project, an interdisciplinary creative residency that welcomed artists, writers, scholars, and scientists. After the closing of OIP, the house eventually reverted back to a private residence, as the permanent home of Eleanor “Sandy” Torrey West, from 1987 until 2016. Upon her death in 2021, the house and its 23-acre surrounding estate became part of the State of Georgia’s Ossabaw Island Heritage Preserve, protected from development and limited to use for natural, scientific, cultural and educational purposes. Throughout the decades, the 15 bedroom/16 bathroom residence endured with few major alterations, preserving its original character even as use, time and coastal conditions took their toll.

Story continues with rehabilitation photos on page 8-9...

Watch *Torrey Home Turns 100: Rehabilitating a “Southern palace” on Ossabaw Island, Georgia*. Presented at the 2026 Ossabaw Night in Savannah.



Executive Director's Letter



Photo by Robin Gunn

On March 12, I joined 200 people in a first look at *Off the Coast of Paradise: Artists and Ossabaw Island, 1961–Now*, the retrospective art exhibition at Telfair Museums' Jepson Center for the Arts in Savannah. This groundbreaking new exhibition, masterfully researched and curated by Erin Dunn and Beryl Gilothwest, is on view until September 6.

The main upper floor galleries of Savannah's premiere art museum have been shaped into an Ossabaw Island oasis—complete with a 1960s color palate—evoking not only the island's physical landscape, but also the intellectual and creative conditions that Clifford and Eleanor “Sandy” West fostered beginning in 1961 through the Ossabaw Island Project, and continuing in 1970 with their second program, *Genesis*. *Off the Coast of Paradise* is an invitation to step into a place, but also into history, to a place and time outside the noise of daily life, where ideas unfolded at OIP over long dinners and quiet walks, and at *Genesis* through collaborative living, creating, and engaging with the elements.

On my first approach, ascending the Jepson's white marble stairs felt less like entering an exhibition and more like crossing into a different world. At the third floor landing, visitors are greeted by a floor-to-ceiling film screen projecting the luminous coastal imagery of Ossabaw Island, in aerial footage captured by Steve Bransford of Emory University's Georgia Coast Atlas Project. As I watched this footage of the marshes, beaches, and forests of Ossabaw, something began to shift; the mainland began to fall away.

Moving through the exhibition, I was reminded that Ossabaw was never just a location—it was a condition. Artists, writers, composers, and thinkers arrived with their own disciplines, but on the island, those boundaries softened. The work on view reflects that permeability. Paintings, sculpture, fiber art, photographs, texts, film, and sound pieces feel less like isolated outputs and more like echoes of a shared experience—of time spent in conversation with each other and with the landscape.

The exhibition is more than a collection of artworks. The story it tells—of American art, coastal Georgia history, and conservation—unfolds like chapters in a book. The first gallery space focuses on The Ossabaw Island Project, with subsequent spaces featuring the *Genesis* Project, early 21st century Ossabaw artists, and makers whose most recent visits were in early 2026. Historic films by Clifford West and photos by former project members add context, offering glimpses of artists and other creators, the Wests, and island staff who kept the entire enterprise functioning. The exhibition makes visible that Ossabaw is not frozen in the past but continues to evolve as a site of inquiry and inspiration. It reminds me that a place can shape not only what artists create, but also how they think, listen, and see.

A powerful contemporary example is Allison Janae Hamilton's new film *Venus of Ossabaw*, inspired by the research of Dr. Paul Pressly, which explores marronage—the act of escaping slavery in the Americas to establish independent, self-liberated communities—bringing this layered and often hidden history into the present through a poetic, place-based lens.

Over the last 28 years I have spent countless days on Ossabaw Island, yet this exhibition revealed many facets of the island to me in a completely new way. Whether you're an Ossabaw veteran or have not yet stepped onto the island, this exhibition offers all of us a rare gift—the chance to experience, even briefly, the kind of focused, unhurried engagement that defines 20th and 21st century Ossabaw. *Off the Coast of Paradise* celebrates this important place and reminds me that preserving and experiencing places like Ossabaw are essential to the human spirit.

Elizabeth DuBose
Executive Director
Ossabaw Island Foundation

For more information
about the exhibition,
scan here:





Visit Ossabaw Island in 2026!

Photo by Paul Meacham

How to Register: The following trips are open to the public. Fees vary. To register for all Ossabaw Island Foundation-sponsored events, visit ossabawisland.org OR call 912-344-3900 OR scan the QR codes below. Pre-registration required.



Lift Every Voice: Ossabaw Island and Pin Point Fee-Free Day Trip

Sat. June 6

This morning walking tour of the North End Plantation site provides an overview of Ossabaw's African-American and Gullah-Geechee culture and history; followed by an afternoon visit to the Pin Point Heritage Museum in the Gullah-Geechee community established by formerly enslaved people from Ossabaw Island. Free-of-charge for island admission. Fee covers discounted museum admission and boat transportation.



A Hands-On Indigo Dyeing Experience: Ossabaw Island Indigo Day Trip

Sun. September 20

Elizabeth DuBose and Mark Frissell share the history of Ossabaw indigo, provide instruction on creating fresh-leaf indigo dye vats, and guide participants through the dyeing process.



Get Creative on Ossabaw: Day Trip

Sat. October 3

Paint, sketch, write, or take photos on Ossabaw Island. Let the island be your muse. After a brief history presentation, you'll have several hours to wander the North End on your own and make art.



Ossabaw Island Beach Ecology Day Trip

Sat. October 10

Enjoy this coastal ecology trip to Bradley Beach on Ossabaw's Bradley Point, overlooking Ossabaw Sound and the Atlantic Ocean.



Day Trip Tour of Ossabaw Island's North End

Sat. November 7

Travel by pontoon boat through the Moon River District to the island's North End for an interpretive tour that includes ecology and history, plus time on your own.

OSSABAW

O n this island where
S o much sea and so many
S oils have run wild in sand
A nd where rookeries with snowy egret
B ecome one with the marsh grass and live oak,
A n animal in fresh water
W aits beneath the nest for
the flightless chick to fall

Thomas Rain Crowe
Ossabaw Island, Georgia
April 1999

Worship

Today I rode through a forest untouched, primordial.
Silent as a cathedral,
a holy hush.

The silence is a physical presence
so profound that it makes my knees weak,
as though I'm standing on the edge of a precipice.

The bones of trees encircle me,
their living kin, like saints, stand on the shore.
The encroaching tide
resigning them to the same fate.
I am an intruder here.
I make myself small so that
I am allowed to stay.

Pelicans take a diving communion,
fish, sea
body, blood.
I offer up a prayer of thanksgiving
to whatever god made this beauty
and marvel that he made me, too.

Leandra M. Nessel
Boneyard Beach, Ossabaw Island, Georgia
July 2018



Photo by Ben Wells

Sponsor Our Public Use and Education Programs

Give hundreds of people each year the unique opportunity to spend a day on an unspoiled barrier island or experience some of Ossabaw on the mainland.

TOIF's Public Use and Education Programs offer the public unique opportunities to discover and learn about Ossabaw's barrier island ecology and human history. Through our tours, hands-on instruction, personal encounters, and events held on the mainland, our participants experience the voices, mystery, and beauty of Ossabaw in ways that are not possible elsewhere.

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Thank you to the following donors to the Ossabaw Fund who contributed in October 2025 - March 2026. Your generous donations comprise 23% of our operating budget; this allows the Foundation the opportunity to share Ossabaw Island with the world. Thank you!

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Photo by Fran Lapolla

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Ossabaw donkey “adopters” October 2025 - March 2026

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Adopt A
Donkey Here:





A Century Renewed: The Torrey-West House Turns 100

Continued from cover...

In 2024, led by Georgia Governor Brian Kemp, the State of Georgia committed \$7.2 million for a comprehensive rehabilitation of the Torrey-West House and surrounding structures. Thanks to the leadership of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, the vision of architect Eric Pettingill of CROFT & Associates, the expertise of Bill Deaton of TCC Contracting, and the stewardship of Mark Frissell and Elizabeth DuBose of the Ossabaw Island Foundation, the house has been thoughtfully rehabilitated. Behind its historic walls, modern systems—electrical, plumbing, climate control, and fire protection—have been carefully integrated, allowing the house to function safely and sustainably while honoring its historic fabric. Its rustic splendor of the 20th century has been preserved or thoughtfully repaired with the help of skilled craftspeople like blacksmith Jim Archambault and ceramicist France Dorman.

In January 2026, the completed house was turned over to the Ossabaw Island Foundation, in accordance with the Use Agreement for the island that gives TOIF exclusive use of the island's North End, and responsibility for nearly a dozen buildings, including the three tabby cabins, the Club House, the Boarding House, and all structures on the Torrey-West Estate. With the rehabilitation complete, the next chapter begins: furnishing the interior; welcoming scientists, educators, and creatives; and, renewing the spirit of exchange that has defined Ossabaw Island for a century.

The rehabilitation of the Torrey-West House is more than a construction milestone—it is a reaffirmation of purpose. This historic place will once again serve as a place of gathering, learning, and inspiration, aligned with Ossabaw's designation as Georgia's first Heritage Preserve.

Thank you to Bryan Stovall for documenting the rehabilitation process throughout the months.





A Century Renewed (continued)





*Allison Janae Hamilton on Cane Patch Rd,
Ossabaw Island, November 2025*

Off the Coast of Paradise: Artists and Ossabaw Island, 1961 – Now

March 13 – September 6, 2026

Telfair Museums' Jepson Center for the Arts
207 W. York Street, Savannah

The exhibit transports you into the creative world of Ossabaw Island—an undeveloped, 26,000-acre barrier island off the coast of Savannah that has inspired artists for generations.

Centered on the groundbreaking Ossabaw Island Project and Genesis residency programs (1961–1982), this exhibition reveals how the island became a powerful space for experimentation, collaboration, and artistic freedom. Featuring works by renowned artists across disciplines—alongside a compelling new commission by Allison Janae Hamilton—the show explores Ossabaw through environmental, historical, and deeply personal lenses.



Ossabaw Island Art Auction: A benefit for the Ossabaw Island Foundation



Photo by Barbara Vaughn

Summer Gallery Exhibition of Donated Art: July 1 - 31, 2026

Fine Arts Gallery – Fine Arts Hall

Georgia Southern University
Armstrong Campus in Savannah

11935 Abercorn Street
(Fine Arts Hall faces Science Drive)

Gallery Receptions:

Thursday, July 9, 9 - 11am

Thursday, July 23, 4 - 6pm

Meet many of the artists and see the
Ossabaw-inspired work that they
have donated to this auction.

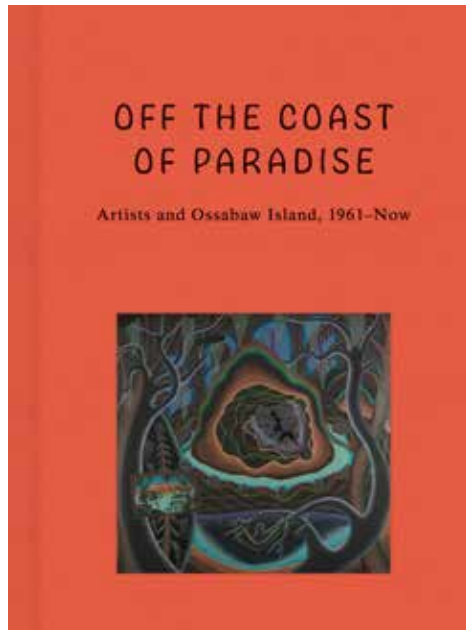
Ossabaw Island Online Art Auction
July 1 - 31, 2026
Auction will be live on July 1,
scan here to preview!





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Off the Coast of Paradise is accompanied by a lavishly illustrated book that takes an in-depth look at the art and history of Ossabaw Island during the 20th century. Get your copy today.

Newsletter Designed by Longwater & Company

ABOUT OSSABAW ISLAND:

Ossabaw Island is a 26,000-acre undeveloped barrier island on the Atlantic Ocean, owned by the State of Georgia and located in Chatham County. Georgia's first Heritage Preserve, accessible only by boat, is undeveloped and set aside by an Executive Order for natural, scientific and cultural study, research and education; and for environmentally sound preservation, conservation and management of the island's ecosystem.

The Ossabaw Island Foundation (TOIF) is a non-profit 501 (c) 3. Through a partnership with the State of Georgia, TOIF inspires, promotes, and manages exceptional educational, cultural, and scientific programs that are designed to maximize the experience of Ossabaw Island, while minimizing the impact on the island's resources.

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1913 - 2021

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