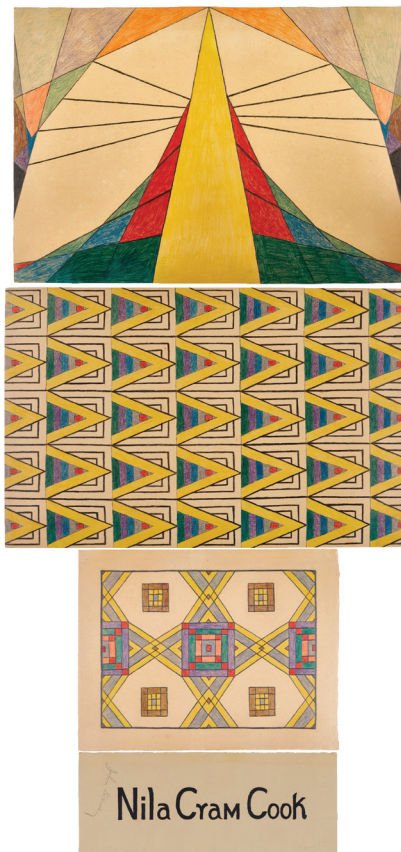




# An Indigenous Present

*An Indigenous Present* includes fifteen artists who pursue abstraction as a tool for liberated expression. The works on view show that abstraction can hold and convey a range of forms and material possibilities, as well as signify personal and collective narratives, symbolize specific and imagined places, and embody cultural and aesthetic traditions. Through subject, process, and material, the included artworks complicate and destabilize preconceptions of what art by Indigenous artists is made with, looks like, and sounds like. This exhibition emerges from the 2023 book *An Indigenous Present*, which surveyed the contemporary arts across a diverse field of North American makers. We consider this exhibition a chapter in the project that is *An Indigenous Present*—hence our incantatory repetition of the title—one in which we envision the ways abstraction can dissolve the hierarchies and categories that confine making, seeing, and thinking. Cocurated by an artist and a curator, this exhibition is both an art historical inquiry and subjective exploration of the ongoing legacy of abstraction among a continuum of elders and emerging makers.

—Jeffrey Gibson and Jenelle Porter



Mary Sully. *Nila Cram Cook*, ca. late 1920s–early 1940s. Colored pencil, graphite, and watercolor on paper; three parts: 12 7/8 x 18 in., 12 x 19 in., 9 1/2 x 12 in. Courtesy The Mary Sully Foundation. Photo: Charles Meyer Photography

The following are statements by each artist about their work.

## Teresa Baker

Abstraction allows the work [to] be autonomous. I want to get the work to a place where I can't place it.

## Raven Chacon

*Compass . . .* explores this idea of reading the pulses and paces of the world around us. There are things happening in nature, and then there is music. And somehow, we can read these things, we can be a part of them and then respond, and the aligning of the musician with the rest of the world is what creates the music.

## Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill

Making art [is] another way of thinking and using your body at the same time. What can the materials tell me? What economic conditions have produced those materials; like, what circumstances brought blackberries here? They're from England, so they are an invasive plant that came here with British people, but it's also a plant that I grew up picking.



Teresa Baker. *Knife River*, 2024. Yarn, buckskin, artificial sinew, and willow on AstroTurf; 63 x 107 in. Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston, Acquired through the generosity of the Acquisitions Circle. Courtesy the artist and Broadway Gallery, New York. © Teresa Baker. Photo: Ruben Diaz

## Sky Hopinka

These things I'm making are experiments—attempts at conveying things that are challenging to explain in traditional ways and that we often expect cultures outside of a mainstream Western frame to be engaged with. Like the work, I can be a bit abstract and poetic. There's things that I'm trying to work through myself.

## Sonya Kelliher-Combs

[The] walrus tusk shape is a form found in Indigenous parkas. I adapted the form to look more like a pouch because I was thinking about the concept of baggage. Secrets vary, but everybody carries some around in both literal and metaphorical ways. For example, I learned that the Catholic Church has acknowledged thirty-five allegations of abuse in Alaskan communities since the 1930s. But many more instances went unacknowledged, with the offending priests quietly relocated.

## George Longfish

I have strong connections to the Native American culture—the color, the symbols—but I use a new style of imagery, and there's some sense of throwing off.

## Dakota Mace

I love messing with this very rigid conformity of photography being very much grounded in “each print has to look exactly the same.” . . . I love messing with this idea of editions within my work, and playing [with] this idea of seriality, because not every print is the same. And I think [what's] important is that it speaks to this larger conversation about individuality and our stories being one collective experience.

## Kimowan Metchewais

I've come to see that I am interested in dichotomic ambiguity. What often seems like indecision was actually a subconscious attempt to find the place between one thing and another . . . I have found this to be true in my own works. It's there in the tension between illusion and surface, abstract and form, cognitive readings and intuitive seeing, balance and discord. I believe I live in an elusive place, a place that is indefinable. I do concur that I love the time where day meets night. And out of chance, I am neither white nor red.

## Caroline Monnet

Abstraction allows me to convey my ideas through minimal means. I want to stress the limits of the monochrome through transformations that turn materials into poetic forms that can symbolize the ways we remain present and builders of societies.

## George Morrison

I went through a period of using thick paint. . . . This gave more immediacy to the painting . . . showing the thickness and movement of the pigment. . . . This was my version of gestural painting, which



Caroline Monnet. *When Will They See Us*, 2019. Tyvek and fabric; 67 1/2 x 73 1/2 x 7 1/2 in. Courtesy the artist and Blouin Division, Montreal.  
© Caroline Monnet

the other abstract expressionists like [Jackson] Pollock and [Willem] de Kooning were doing. There might be a suggestion of subject matter. . . . but the phenomenon of paint was what the painting was really about.

### **Audie Murray**

I make my work in line with Indigenous worldviews, and use materials in ways that protect the artwork from the public spaces I choose to show them in. Abstraction asks a viewer to focus on the work itself, and not an image.

### **Jaune Quick-to-See Smith**

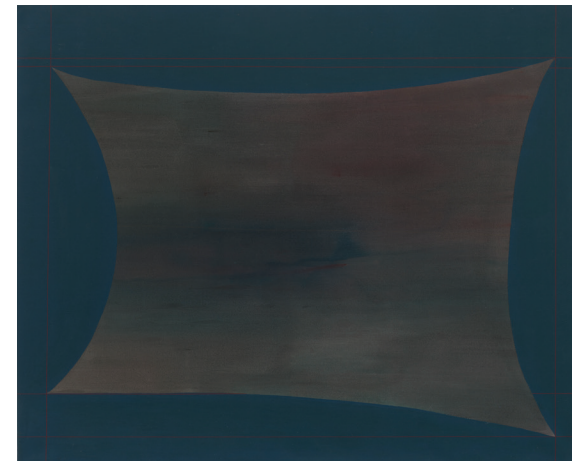
[I] bound together my formalist training, some of the abstract expressionism from my background, and my caring about many of the things in the Indian world. And to me it was one of the greatest steps in my whole career, to put those things together and have it come out with great meaning for me.



Jaune Quick-to-See Smith. *Cree Prayer Series #1*, 1978. Acrylic and pastel on paper; 22 x 15 in. Courtesy the Estate of Jaune Quick-to-See Smith and Garth Greenan Gallery, New York. © The Estate of Jaune Quick-to-See Smith. Photo: ShootART/Christopher Burke Studios

### **Anna Tsouhlarakis**

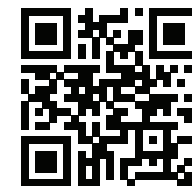
Are there Indigenous materials and non? Or is anything I use a Native material? I'm always going back and forth and playing with those definitions.



### **Kay WalkingStick**

These are not storytelling paintings, these are abstractions, but they do tell a story in a way, and they tell an emotive story. When you move past them, you are encouraged to look at them and stand back and move.

Kay WalkingStick. *Archetypal Image*, 1975. Acrylic and ink on canvas; 42 x 52 x 1 1/2 in. Courtesy the artist and Hales, London and New York. © Kay WalkingStick. Photo: JSP Art Photography



Scan this QR code or visit [FristArtMuseum.org/An-Indigenous-Present](https://FristArtMuseum.org/An-Indigenous-Present) to read the full version of this guide produced by the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston.

# An Indigenous Present

June 26–September 27, 2026  
Upper-Level Galleries

*An Indigenous Present* is organized by the **Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston**.  
The exhibition is curated by **Jeffrey Gibson** and **Jenelle Porter**, guest curators.

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