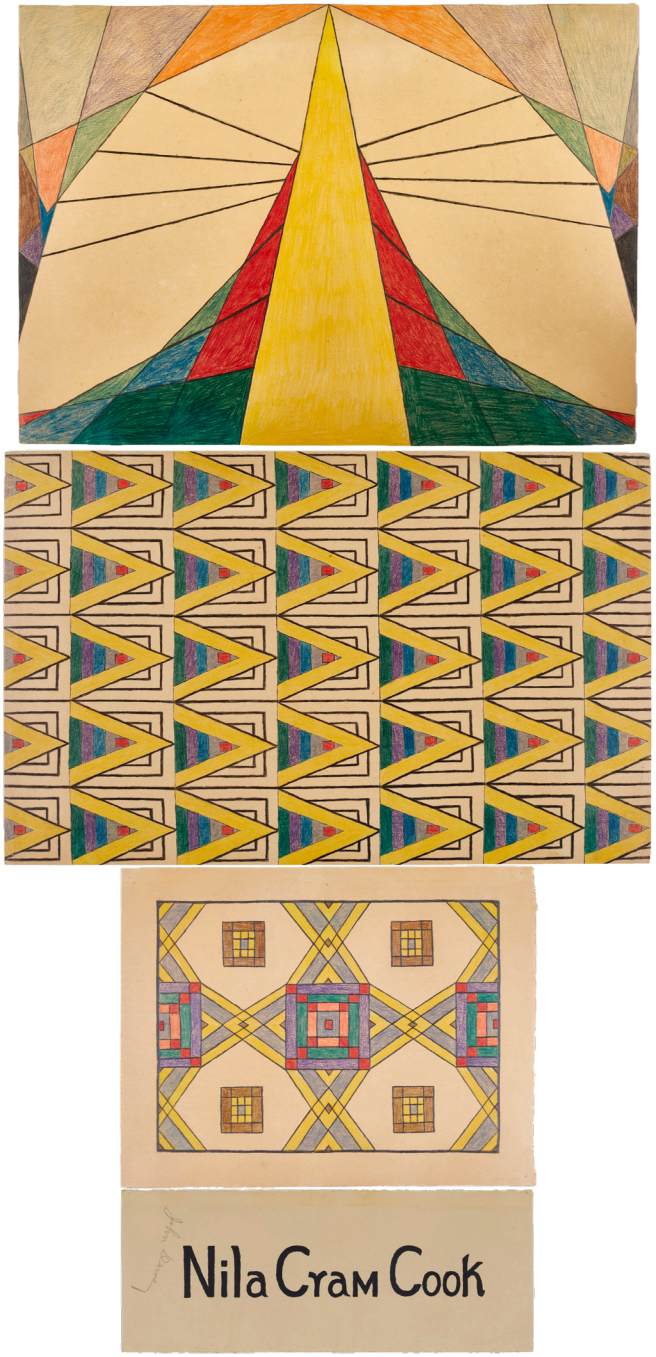
# An Indigenous Present




# 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. Co-curated 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

**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 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.

## Conversation: Jeffrey Gibson and Jenelle Porter on *An Indigenous Present*

**JP** Let's begin with *An Indigenous Present*, the book you initiated in 2021, and that we co-edited and published in 2023. What compelled you to make this book?

**JG** I felt like there were many shifts happening in both the Native and non-Native art worlds over the past ten to fifteen years. There were many more Native artists being presented in contemporary art exhibitions in both museums and commercial galleries than I'd ever witnessed, and I felt like there needed to be a collective document that could serve as a snapshot of this moment and as a way to share significant examples of these artists' practices.

**JP** We started with your list of makers working in art, film, poetry, performance, design, and music. How would you describe the artists you were drawn to?

**JG** There was an initial list of people whose work I had been following for years and knew they should be included, and then I continued looking at very recent exhibitions to find artists who might be new to me or whose work I felt had been overlooked. I wanted the list of artists to reflect the diversity among Native artists. And the majority of them I'd met over the previous twenty years. But also, part of the impulse to make the book came from feeling like an outlier in New York City trying to figure out how to pursue a career as an artist and wanting to be in community with and in context with other contemporary Native artists. I also realized that being in context allowed me to speak about my work specifically, as opposed to just broadly Native American.

**JP** We began the project with meetings, over Zoom, since it was pandemic times, and, to sum up months of work, we used all

TOP George Morrison, *Untitled: Abstract Drawing*, 1951
BOTTOM George Morrison, *Untitled*, 1962

we learned from our conversations with the contributors, and our own experience, to arrive at this massive, 450-page book. We talked often about how we were going for new approaches to presenting work by Indigenous artists, something unique in content and super image driven. Just picture after picture.

**JG** We were both so excited about the book as it was coming together, especially as we could visualize what the end product was going to be like. Then the feedback we received after it came out into the world was so exciting. It's so affirming when I walk into someone's office and see it on their desk or bookshelf.

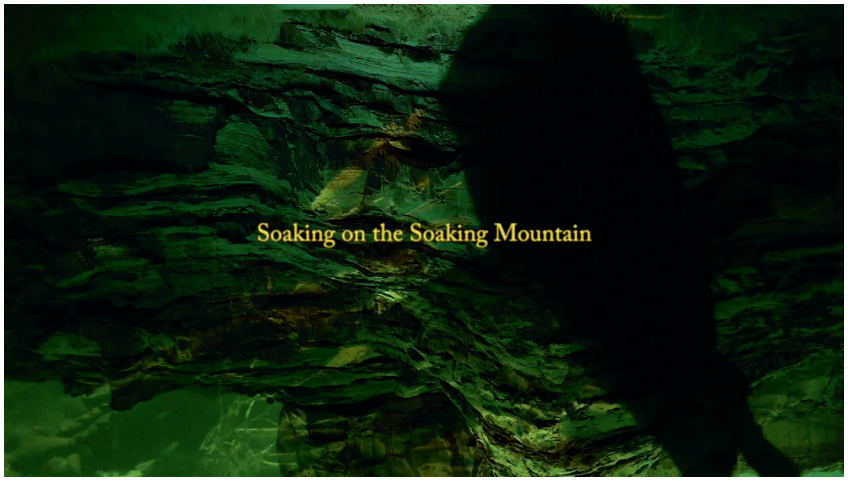
**JP** *An Indigenous Present* was published in fall 2023, and shortly thereafter Ruth Erickson, the chief curator at ICA/Boston, invited us to consider formulating the book as an exhibition. For the record, I was a curator at ICA/Boston from 2011 to 2015, and we did your first solo museum show there in 2013. When I called you about Ruth's invitation, you said, "I can imagine doing this. I have ideas." And I did too, and since at that point we'd worked together enough to know to follow one another's instincts we thought, "let's pursue this."

**JG** I knew with the book we'd set a stage and I thought this exhibition felt like an opportunity to go deeper into the practices of some artists.

**JP** As we began to formulate an exhibition, we drew on all we learned while making the book. And like the book, we want the exhibition to enlarge the contexts and opportunities for Indigenous contemporary artists. Also, we recognize that we choose to work within a context that hasn't often acknowledged the critical contributions of Native artists and thinkers. By and large, our goal to broaden the avenues led us to focus on abstraction.

**JG** We both knew abstraction was broad enough to include almost anything, and yet our goal was to shape it into something specific through our understanding of the artists and their artworks. Abstraction is also such a big part of my practice and I was drawn to think deeper about how other Indigenous artists engage with it in their own work.

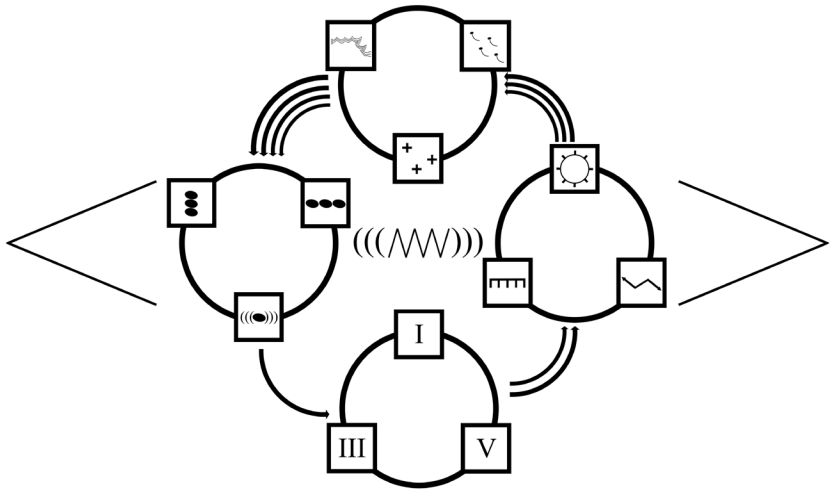
Could you talk about the responses you got when you explained to the invited artists that we were going to explore abstraction?




**Teresa Baker** Abstraction allows the work be autonomous. I want to get the work to a place where I can't place it.

**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.

TOP Teresa Baker, *Knife River*, 2024
BOTTOM Sky Hopinka, *Mnemonics of Shape and Reason* (still), 2021




**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.

**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.

**JP** What first comes to mind is the response I characterize as, "Finally!" as in, abstraction is rarely foregrounded in these artists' work even though it's absolutely fundamental. That response was so encouraging, like, as curators we're onto something here. Another response that I didn't necessarily expect was that every artist agreed to participate. I didn't expect it because this exhibition includes only Indigenous artists, which slots into the problematics of identity-focused projects being restrictive and essentialist. Some of the artists shared that they prefer their work be exhibited within frameworks of Indigeneity, community, and collective identity. With that in mind, how would you characterize what these artists hold in common?

**JG** I might describe it as a lived awareness of circumstances that impact Native communities. As a Native person in this country, I am aware that political and social events impact how people view me as a person. It's impossible for me to be an artist devoid of those circumstances. These circumstances have shaped my worldview, and directly affect what I make as an artist.

I mean, not to make light of it, but one thing that you could ask almost anyone in this exhibition, living, is "Are you familiar with the occupation of Alcatraz?" Yes. "Are you familiar with NAGPRA [Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act]?" Yes. "Are you familiar with the Indian Arts and Crafts Act?" Yes. "Are you familiar with the song 'Half-Breed' by Cher?" Yes. If you're not Native, I can't presume that you're aware of these things, and how they have impacted image making, how we think about liberation and sovereignty, and what role artists have played within these circumstances.

Also, this makes me think about how many tribes are now federally recognized that weren't in 1990. The rapidity of change that I've seen during my lifetime is remarkable. And these shifting circumstances have real impact on Native identity within a tribal community, and also on how tribal members work outside of their home communities.

**JP** These shared lived experiences can sometimes be read through artworks in the exhibition. For instance, in 1978, Congress passes the American Indian Religious Freedom Act which returns basic civil liberties to Native American peoples, including the freedom to practice traditional religious rights. The same year, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith makes *Cree Prayer Series*. Knowing the

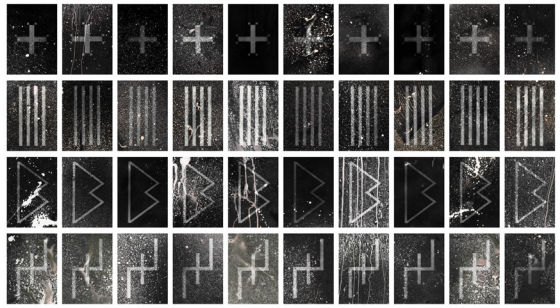
TOP George Longfish, *Take Two Aspirins and Call Me in the Morning, You Are on Target*, 1984
BOTTOM Raven Chacon, *Compass*, 2021

ways she mixed art, activism, and advocacy, we could presume a correlation. On the other hand, these works on paper are abstract compositions, and the association is one I'm interpreting through her title. This is just one example of the ways artists traffic in abstraction, specifically the verb form, to abstract. Abstraction is this incredibly flexible tool that allows artists a liberated field in which to make and think and see and hear. But we've included artists who use abstraction in ways that counter what is typically expected of contemporary Indigenous artists.

**JG** We chose artists who have pushed traditional forms of cultural abstraction into realms that don't directly reference specific cultural traditions. They are experimenting with it, pushing it into places where it's still tethered to where the reference originates from, but in a new format that can make it almost unrecognizable. For instance, Raven Chacon's scores are visually stunning, but they're not just visual—they're meant to be performed. Sometimes they're meant to be played by specific people in specific places. What he makes is not simple music. It's not punk, or thrash, or noise. He's crafted his own medium using all of these components. And Mary Sully, with her "personality prints," you can track the transitions of abstraction from drawing to drawing, and this reflects the various cultural distinctions that she witnessed within her lifetime. With Kimowan Metchewais, it's his materiality that strikes me. There's a vulnerability in his work that seems so self-aware. It is a privilege to be able to see it in person because why would it last this long? Or Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill, using blackberry ink on paper. These artists bring concept into how their work has to be maintained, how it has to be cared for, how it transforms over time. This shares something with Audie Murray's embrace of the temporal. What is meant to be seen? How do you protect something? How do you transform something so you can share it, but not reveal it?

**JP** Right, like how Murray uses bear grease as both art medium and traditional material. I'd love for you describe abstraction in your work. What does it do for you, why do you use it?

**JG** For a long time, I was not comfortable with representational image making. There are religious reasons why some people don't make images, and a long-standing narrative about Native people's distrust of being documented in photographs. And when I was



TOP LEFT Kay WalkingStick, *Chief Joseph Series* (detail), 1974–76
TOP RIGHT Caroline Monnet, *When Will They See Us*, 2019
BOTTOM Dakota Mace, *So' II (Stars II)*, 2022

**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.

**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.

**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.

handling material objects in museum collections, in the early 1990s, I was taught that there are things you're not supposed to touch. There are ways that you're meant to approach things. Things that are not meant to be shared, things that are meant to be kept private, or shared in very specific circumstances. I never really wanted to give in to those reasons as to why I was uncomfortable creating images, but they continued to linger in my mind and cause me to consider the rich interstitial spaces before and after the image. That led to the impulse to try and communicate through abstraction. Over time, I learned how distracting images can be for a viewer. That some of the best material use and technical mastery can be happening out of the center of the picture. The minute you put a recognizable image into a picture, everything else becomes secondary. The power in abstraction is that it's never fixed. Questions remain open.

JP We've had the good fortune to be in conversation about our work for over a decade now, and this has inflected our approach to this exhibition. One example in particular is our desire to look across generations of artists as a way to think through abstraction.

JG Our show is not a historical survey, but it's anchored in history by artists like Mary Sully and George Morrison.

JP These were two of the first artists we put on our list. From there, we added and subtracted, sort of stress-testing abstraction as an idea through the work of particular artists. We made many shows in our heads and on paper. And also we made up rules, or guidelines, for our curatorial process.

JG Yes. So one of our rules was to root the exhibition with a few artists, working within a frame of abstraction, who we considered in terms of their commitment to a practice of artmaking that unfolded over decades and in very specific ways. These artists were equally committed to finding ways to place their art into the broader critical dialogues of their time. So, like Morrison's interest in surrealism and his involvement with the New York School painters. Even though Sully's output lasts just over a decade, there's development and consistency. Morrison's and Kay WalkingStick's careers span six decades, and Jaune's over five. There has been a long-standing division between the Native and non-Native art world, right. So for this show, we thought a lot about artists who were dedicated to their practice and also wanted very much for it to be out in the world.

I respond to these artists because they made work with the idea that it might reach beyond Native audiences. Many of them were living and working outside of their home communities, and that is a very clear decision. I've known many Native artists who enjoy and feel very gratified by making work for their communities, right, but to use myself as an example, I always knew I wanted to come to New York City and pursue a career as an artist within a global context. That's where I find affinity with the artists in the book and in this exhibition. I think about the ways that Audie, Gabrielle, Sky, Caroline, Anna, and Teresa are going to influence the generations coming up.

JP Of Sully and Morrison, I recall you asking me, sort of rhetorically, "Where did these artists find permission? How did they give it to themselves?" We can think through their unique and circumstantial experiences, but that doesn't get us all that closer to permission and agency.

I'm going to tack back. We want to make connections across generations of artists. One approach we use is to include a few pivotal works that mark transitions in an artist's oeuvre. Here I'm talking about early works by WalkingStick and Smith. We looked at what they made, and why they made it, amidst seismic societal and political shifts, Vietnam War protests, feminism and motherhood, civil rights, and Red Power movements. We see in their works, from the 1970s into early 1980s, calculated shifts from non-representational abstraction to the use of cultural symbols and subjects. What I'm trying to summarize is the ways this exhibition exploits those tensions and pivots, for example, when Smith's formal affinities were rooted in abstract expressionism, or for WalkingStick, minimalism. We can track them finding their voice, their style, and see their influence on other artists, whether directly, in their art, or indirectly, in their way of moving through the world. We wanted to bring these histories to the present, first, so they remain critical, and second, because many people haven't had the chance to see these artworks.

JG This influenced how we designed the floorplan. We discussed the experience that we wanted for a viewer, and the importance, for me, to have a quasi-chronological thread that guides a visitor from where they enter the exhibition to where they exit.

JP After the first gallery of Sullys and Morrisons, which is like an establishing shot, the galleries break out into concentrations that illuminate abstract thinking and abstract making that show a range of visual and conceptual dialogues among the artworks. We included a relatively small group of artists so we could show multiple works by each, and in different galleries. Despite the historical lead off, we ultimately resisted the models of historical survey or categorizing groupings of medium or subject.

**JG** Even though the show is not a historical survey, we do have works from every decade.

**JP** But we've resisted the model of the historical survey. It may bear sharing that not only did we make a set of guidelines for our curatorial work, we've constructed a resistance to summarizing or distilling this exhibition. I know we both believe that art should not and cannot be distilled. We're on team complexity, to the end.

**JG** Right. And I will say, Jenelle, you would do the same thing for any exhibition that you worked on. That is your relationship to art.

**JP** I appreciate that. I crave complexity, even when it's an occupational hazard. I don't want to be able to describe an artwork in one sentence. That's a sales tactic and it's pretty much the opposite of what art is to me.

**JG** Right, like you could distill it, but the tradeoff for distilling an artwork into "of the moment" language and ideas can defer an objective description that might best reflect the artist's choices and the material qualities of the work itself.

**JP** In fact, across both the book and now this exhibition, we've not only assumed this anti-distillation approach but we've talked a lot about how this can be a tool to foreground the need for more specificity in the ways we talk and write about work by Indigenous artists. Would you talk about this?

**JG** There were many times when I was dissatisfied with how little research curators put towards understanding how to best present my work, and how to contextualize it among both Native and non-Native art histories. Many times, I have acted as editor for writing about my work, and have been responsible for delivering content for how to best present it. I want curators to better understand the cultural context that Native artists are working within, which is political, social, tethered to specific communities, and has its own artistic traditions.

Then there is the potential flattening effect of terms like Native American Art and Indigenous Art. These terms don't always promote the diversity among Native artists and their individual backgrounds. I have questioned the best way to present these artists

TOP Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, *Cree Prayer Series #1*, 1978
BOTTOM Audie Murray, *Bear Smudge*, 2022, and *Remnants of Transference*, 2022
FOLLOWING PAGE Kimowan Metchewais, *Chief's Blanket*, 2002

**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.

**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.


**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.

and their work on their own terms without wrapping it up in feel-good language that often others the artist and their work. How can we dive into the work and let it stand on its own?

**JP** To extend your point, *An Indigenous Present* is a rejection of monolithic categorizing. And we hope it offers an occasion to think through artworks with specificity, which may offer opportunities to learn to read an artwork by an artist whose heritage is Diné, Mandan/Hidatsa, Anishinaabe, Cree, or Athabascan. What do we know? What is legible? What is obscured? And how can we begin to learn more about networks of influence?

**JG** This brings us back to the rules we set for ourselves when we began to conceptualize this exhibition. One of those rules was to make an exhibition that assumes visitors arrive with some basic knowledge of Indigenous art and art history. We were determined to start at what we refer to as "Day 3, or Day 4," as in, the third or fourth day of a conference, the days after all the basic information has been shared and you get deeper into the subject. Maybe that's not reflective of reality, but it was our decision to jump into the artwork without prefacing it with an introductory history lesson.

I think what we did with the book and what we're trying to do with this exhibition is to create the world that we want to see, that "Day 3, Day 4" version as a starting point in place of a "Day 1" we're constantly rebuilding from. We didn't allow ourselves to use certain terms. We didn't want to pull these artists back into a nineties identity politics conversation. We didn't want to present these artists as "just as good" as other artists represented in the mainstream art historical canon. The rules we made left me without a lot to say sometimes, but it made us look at the work in deeper ways and struggle to describe it.

**JP** I'm enjoying listening to you characterize our curatorial process this way. We made cul-de-sacs for ourselves, intentionally and intuitively, so that we wouldn't meander. Our self-imposed rules required that we submit to states of not knowing which could be both awkward and exhilarating. We'd explain the project, at first, in terms of what it wasn't. Kind of like backing up into the project.

**JG** Also, it's really important that we're making this together. We've known each other for a very long time. You organized my first

Sonya Kelliher-Combs, *Red Large Beaded Secrets*, 2023

**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.

**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.

solo museum exhibition and I don't feel like you ever put me in a box. And you're so committed as a curator. You could have finished the book and been done. But the fact that you wanted to go deeper was really great because it's what I wish all curators in North America would do when it comes to Indigenous art. It's like, yeah, these are the artists who are the Indigenous people of this land. You should be aware of them. You should go deeper.

I've worked with some really great curators, and I've worked with some who were afraid to bring their own opinions in because, I think, of the fear of "getting it wrong" because they're not Native. What's important to me, and has been for a very long time, is that I want both Native and non-Native curators to invite me to exhibit in their Native and non-Native spaces. Part of that desire is wanting to feel like a complete person, right? Because the feeling that you're only being asked to exhibit your work because you're Native is a demeaning one. I have felt that my work somehow isn't as good as or isn't as appreciated, you know.

**JP** You and I have talked about the reasons these conditions persist in art spaces, that they're somewhat cyclical and reflective of what's happening in society and culture.

**JG** We're in a period of such divisiveness when it comes to race and culture. It's important that we continue working together and presenting an example that you can have committed people from very different backgrounds come together and create something pretty fantastic. I mean, let's be clear: we came up in a generation that told us, "If this isn't your lived experience, you have no right to speak about it."

**JP** Right. And I'd add that you and I just creeped into our fifties, and when we were in college in the early 1990s it was the midpoint of a multicultural era, so we had a glimmer of something more collaborative, however imperfect at that time.

**JG** We didn't allow the fear of making mistakes stop us from making this exhibition, or the book. And this way of working comes with responsibility, and asks us to let the artwork speak for itself. We're not trying to put definitions on their work. We're trying to create an environment where the artworks speak for themselves and create a challenging context for the other works in the exhibition.

TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill, *Out of Time*, 2023, and *Sunlight*, 2024
BOTTOM Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill, *Site Parasite Dice Paradise* (detail), 2023

**JP** And in addition to allowing the art to speak on its own terms, we hope the framework of the exhibition and the way we talk about it contributes to a critical apparatus that artists deserve and want. A lot of critical thinking is behind-the-scenes, person to person, but informs, for example, what we write for the show, from a wall label to the press release. Our approach minimizes the dependence on biographical narrative as the primary explanation of an artist's work. There is also acknowledgement that many of the included artists aren't compelled to speak to every kind of audience.

**JG** The reasons why those personal and biographical stories are interesting to a non-Native audience, in my opinion, sometimes don't have a whole lot to do with the specific artworks that we are looking at and discussing.

**JP** This reminds me that when I asked Teresa Baker about some of the visual sources for her *Winter Stories*, she shared with me some of the personal experiences and cultural aspects that inform that work. But this information falls under artist-curator privilege. Suffice it to say that she turns content into process, and creates objects that she describes as brushing up against the personal and the cultural.

**JG** Once you describe the work through the lens of a biographical narrative, there's very little opportunity for any sort of objective criticality, because how can you disagree with somebody's personal and emotional narrative. In my experience this can easily become an "othering" kind of circumstance for the artist. People don't want to make a mistake and misinterpret something and offend the artist. I have always been concerned that this sets up a kind of performativity on both sides, for the artist and the curator, and early in my career I knew what kind of answer would satisfy the person asking the question.

So, while artists are grappling with the art world's use, and misuse, of biographical narrative, there is the responsibility to your community, in whatever way you define that, right? Another Choctaw or Cherokee person might wonder, "What kind of Choctaw person am I? What kind of Cherokee person am I? Do you speak your language? Who's your grandmother? What community are you from?"

TOP Anna Tsouhlarakis, *IF SHE WAS AT THE PARTY, SHE WOULD HAVE DUMPED MORE THAN TEA* (detail), 2025
BOTTOM Kay WalkingStick, *Apron Agitato*, 1974

**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.

So, I'm always navigating both my own autonomy from all these thoughts, and my relationship to them. Which ultimately become one and the same thing.

**JP** I'm going to pick up on the weight of responsibility. Since we began work on the book, we've talked often about our goal of broadening the avenues for artists, rather than say, rerouting. You said earlier that we're not trying to re-establish these artists as just as good as those artists who've been canonized. We've talked about doing this work without revising histories.

**JG** There's a lot of criticism against revisionist histories, and part of the criticism has to do with people feeling that what they believe in is being challenged. That's one aspect of it, right? Something that they hold valuable and stable is being challenged. I would rather have the broadest picture available to me. It enables me to make the best decisions for myself and for the greater good. It's not revisionist. It's just about enlarging the pool of information and giving people the freedom, encouragement, and autonomy to explore it all and arrive at their own perspective. I'm a believer in just adding more information to the pot and letting it do its own thing. It's like, if you imagine that you're making a soup, it's going to taste a little different depending on which ingredients you add, or don't.

**JP** I couldn't agree more. And Jeff, maybe all exhibitions should be described in terms of soup. [Laughs.] I hear in your words, an echo of an essay by Kimowan Metchewais that has come to feel like a guide for our project, and dare I say, current affairs. He used the term "live relics" for his work, and he meant the trace elements of history and memory and culture that he used in his work. He wrote, "The world is rich with live relics. I encourage you to seek them out for yourself. You can find them in your own surroundings, your everyday life. Look for ancient mechanisms that persist within your personal environment and society at large. Notice how the past shapes the present and ask to what end. Resist obvious descriptions and repeated reasoning. This is how you find live relics."

Edited from conversations conducted on July 31 and August 4, 2025.

Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, *Ronan Robe #1*, 1977

**Jaune Quick-to-See Smith** Large organic shapes of canvas became my abstract paintings, made with oil paint, charcoal, wax, and smoke. Digging a pit in my backyard for burning cottonwood root, allowing it to smolder, then rolling the canvas to enclose the smoke created a work pattern, a sense of woman's work. I sought that physical connection from my traditional past to my contemporary present.

# Works in the exhibition

## TERESA BAKER
Mandan/Hidatsa; born 1985 in Watford City, ND

*Winter Stories*, 2022
Spray paint, yarn, and buckskin on artificial turf
96 × 92 inches (243.8 × 233.7 cm)
Collection of Teresa Baker and Michael Mason

*Knife River*, 2024
Yarn, buckskin, artificial sinew, and willow on artificial turf
63 × 107 inches (160 × 271.8 cm)
Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston. Acquired through the generosity of the Acquisitions Circle

*Of This Time*, 2024
Acrylic, yarn, and cottonwood on artificial turf
58 × 46 1/2 inches (147.3 × 118.1 cm)
Collection of Charlotte and Herbert S. Wagner III

*Throw It to the Ocean*, 2025
Acrylic, yarn, Monterey cypress seed pods, willow, and artificial sinew on artificial turf
127 1/2 × 116 inches (323.9 × 294.6 cm)
Private collection, Los Angeles

## RAVEN CHACON
Diné; born 1977 in Fort Defiance, Navajo Nation

*American Ledger No. 1*, 2018/2020
Screenprint on wool and synthetic blanket
60 × 78 inches (152.4 × 198.1 cm)
Collection of the artist

*Compass*, 2021
Score
Courtesy the artist

*Controlled Burn*, 2025
10-channel, site-specific sound installation
Courtesy the artist

## SKY HOPINKA
Ho-Chunk Nation; born 1984 in Bellingham, WA

*The outside being here right now*, 2019

*This is a certain body*, 2019

*This is a stronghold*, 2019

*These are days longer than night*, 2019

*These are the moieties*, 2019

*This is the changer*, 2019

*This is you describing what I saw*, 2019

All works inkjet print and etching
13 × 13 inches (33 × 33 cm)
Edition of 3; 2 APs
Courtesy the artist and The Green Gallery, Milwaukee

*Mnemonics of Shape and Reason*, 2021
HD video (color, sound; 4:13 minutes)
Courtesy the artist and Broadway Gallery, New York

## SONYA KELLIHER-COMBS
Iñupiaq and Koyukon Athabascan; born 1969 in Bethel, AK

*Pink Slips 2*, 2023
Acrylic polymer, cotton muslin, steel pins, and paper
Two parts, each 44 1/4 × 22 inches (112.4 × 55.9 cm)

*Red Large Beaded Secrets*, 2023
Acrylic polymer, glass bead, nylon thread, cotton muslin, and paper
40 × 30 inches (101.6 × 76.2 cm)

*Salmon Curl*, 2023
Acrylic polymer, reindeer hair, acid-free mylar, nylon thread, and steel pins
Sixty objects, each approximately 19 × 3 × 3 1/2 inches (48.3 × 7.6 × 8.9 cm)
Forge Project Collection, traditional lands of the Moh-He-Con-Nuck

*Salmon Curl II*, 2025
Acrylic polymer, reindeer and caribou hair, quill, acid-free mylar, and steel pins
Sixty objects, each approximately 19 × 3 × 3 1/2 inches (48.3 × 7.6 × 8.9 cm)

Unless noted otherwise, all works courtesy the artist and Tureen, Dallas

## GABRIELLE L'HIRONDELLE HILL
Cree and Métis; born 1979 in Comox, British Columbia

*Curtains*, 2023
Blackberry ink, pencil, photocopied paper cutouts, burn marks, and glue on silk tissue
27 1/2 × 21 1/2 inches (69.8 × 54.6 cm)

*Echo Body*, 2023
Blackberry ink, pencil, burn marks, and 16mm splicing tape on silk tissue
27 1/2 × 21 1/2 inches (69.8 × 54.6 cm)
Collection of John Cook

*Fade-out*, 2023
Blackberry ink, pencil, photocopied paper cutouts, stickers, and glue on silk tissue
27 1/2 × 21 1/2 inches (69.8 × 54.6 cm)

*M******, 2023
Stacking chairs, T-shirts, sneakers, 16mm film, and projectors
Installed dimensions variable

*Octom***, 2023
Disassembled umbrellas, paper cutouts, wire, tape, and thread
75 1/2 × 37 3/8 × 37 3/8 inches (192 × 95 × 95 cm) (overall)

*Out of Time*, 2023
Blackberry ink, pencil, hair, and glue on silk tissue
27 1/2 × 21 1/2 inches (69.8 × 54.6 cm)
Collection of John Cook

*Site Parasite Dice Paradise*, 2023
Disassembled umbrellas, paper cutouts, strawberries, spider cocoon, wire, tape, and thread
75 1/2 × 37 3/8 × 37 3/8 inches (192 × 95 × 95 cm) (overall)

*Shadow*, 2024
Blackberry ink, hair ash, paper cutouts, burn marks, dried strawberry, thread, and glue on silk tissue paper
Approximately 59 × 39 3/8 inches (150 × 100 cm)

*Project*, 2024
Blackberry ink, burn marks, and glue on silk tissue paper
59 × 39 3/8 inches (150 × 100 cm)

Unless noted otherwise, all works courtesy the artist and Unit 17, Vancouver, British Columbia

## GEORGE LONGFISH
Seneca and Tuscarora; born 1942 in Ohsweken, Ontario

*I Will Never Be the Same When I Leave My Father's Lodge*, 1978–82
Acrylic, cloth, thread, synthetic elk teeth, and beads on canvas
84 × 132 inches (213.4 × 302.3 cm)

*Take Two Aspirins and Call Me in the Morning, You Are on Target*, 1984
Acrylic on canvas
85 × 117 inches (215.9 × 297.2 cm)

All works The Fine Arts Collection, Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem Museum of Art, University of California at Davis. Gift of the artist

## DAKOTA MACE
Diné; born 1991 in Albuquerque, NM

*Béésh Ligaii (Silver I)*, 2022
Chemigram
Forty parts, each 7 × 5 inches (17.8 × 12.7 cm); 35 5/8 × 63 1/2 inches (90.5 × 161.3 cm) (framed)
Collection of Pamela and Kevin Wolf

*So' Il (Stars II)*, 2022
Chemigram
Forty parts, each 7 × 5 inches (17.8 × 12.7 cm); 35 5/8 × 63 1/2 inches (90.5 × 161.3 cm) (framed)
Courtesy the artist and Bruce Silverstein Gallery, New York

## KIMOWAN METCHEWAIS
Cree; born 1963 in Oxbow, Saskatchewan; died 2011 in St. Paul, Alberta

*Ghost Dancer*, 1998
Photo paper, ink, watercolor, paint, and chalk on paper
55 1/4 × 29 inches (140.3 × 73.7 cm)

*Five Moths*, 2000
Pigments, paint, and adhesive tape on paper
52 × 67 inches (132.1 × 170.2 cm)

*Chief's Blanket*, 2002
Photo paper, ink, pigments, watercolor, and colored pencil on paper
46 7/8 × 70 inches (119 × 178 cm)

*Luther (Striped Man)*, 2003
Photo paper, watercolor, graphite, and adhesive tape on paper
64 × 75 1/2 inches (162.5 × 192 cm) (overall)

All works National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC

## CAROLINE MONNET

Algonquin-Anishinaabe and French; born 1985 in Ottawa, Ontario

*The Flow Between Hard Places*, 2019
Ductal concrete
95 × 48 × 24 inches (241.3 × 121.9 × 61 cm)
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; Purchased with funds by exchange from a gift of Mrs. Jules Loeb, donated by the Ontario Heritage Foundation

*When Will They See Us*, 2019
Tyvek on fabric
67 1/2 × 73 1/2 × 7 1/2 inches (171.5 × 186.7 × 19.1 cm)
Collection of Caitlin Rose and Michel Boislard

*Kikinaham—To Sing Along With 01 & 02*, 2023
Weaving, roof underlay, and waterproofing membrane
Two parts, each 28 × 42 3/4 inches (71.1 × 108.6 cm)
Collection of John Cook

## GEORGE MORRISON

Ojibwe; born 1919 in Chippewa City, MN; died 2000 in Red Rock, MN

*Arch Forms in Blue and Black*, 1946
Ink, colored pencil, and graphite on paper
9 1/2 × 7 1/2 inches (24.1 × 19.1 cm)
Minnesota Museum of American Art, St. Paul, MN. Gift of the artist

*Untitled: Abstract Drawing*, 1951
Wash and ink on paper
9 3/8 × 6 1/2 inches (23.8 × 16.5 cm)
Courtesy Bockley Gallery, Minneapolis

*Structural Landscape with Moons*, 1953
Tempera on paper
19 × 28 1/2 inches (48.3 × 72.4 cm)
Collection of Bockley Gallery, Minneapolis

*Untitled*, 1957
Gouache on paper
23 × 35 inches (58.4 × 88.9 cm)
Private collection; courtesy Bockley Gallery, Minneapolis

*Untitled (Provincetown, Grand Portage)*, 1959–99
Ink on paper
11 1/4 × 8 3/4 inches (28.6 × 22.2 cm)
Collection of Bockley Gallery, Minneapolis

*Untitled*, 1962
Oil on canvas
49 × 69 inches (124.5 × 175.3 cm)
Collection of Barbara Pereyma-Farrara

*Untitled*, 1965
Oil on canvas
53 1/2 × 68 1/2 inches (135.9 × 174 cm)
Gochman Family Collection

*Untitled*, 1973
Ink on paper
23 × 23 inches (58.4 × 58.4 cm)
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Purchased with matching grant from the Museum Purchase Plan and the National Endowment for the Arts, 1973

*The Fire Next Time. Red Rock Variation: Lake Superior Landscape*, 1980
Oil on canvas on board in artist's frame
4 1/2 × 8 5/8 inches (11.4 × 21.9 cm)
Collection of Alice Silha Reimann and Stephen Silha; courtesy Bockley Gallery, Minneapolis

*Three Surrealist Forms, Automatic*, 1984
Colored pencil, ink, and wash on paper
17 × 15 inches (43.2 × 38.1 cm)
Private collection

*Quiet Passage, Approaching Night. Red Rock Variation: Lake Superior Landscape*, 1993
Acrylic on canvas on board in artist's frame
6 3/8 × 14 3/8 × 1 1/2 inches (16.2 × 36.5 × 3.8 cm)
Collection of George Morrison Estate; courtesy Bockley Gallery, Minneapolis

*Evening Layer. Signs of the Jasper. Red Rock Variation: Lake Superior Landscape*, 1995
Acrylic on canvas on board in artist's frame
7 1/2 × 16 1/2 × 1 1/2 inches (19 × 41.9 × 3.8 cm)
Collection of George Morrison Estate; courtesy Bockley Gallery, Minneapolis

## AUDIE MURRAY

Cree and Métis; born 1993 in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

*Bear Smudge*, 2022
Performance for camera (color, sound; 30:00 minutes)

*Remnants of Transference*, 2022
Light-sensitive chemicals on cotton cloth (marked with bear grease, smudge remnants, and light of a sunset), smudge shell, medicine, jar of bear grease, and box of matches
74 × 43 inches (188 × 109.2 cm)

All works courtesy the artist and Fazakas Gallery, Vancouver, British Columbia

## JAUNE QUICK-TO-SEE SMITH

Citizen of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Nation; born 1940 at St. Ignatius Mission, Flathead Reservation, MT; died 2025 in Corrales, NM

*Ronan Robe #1*, 1977
Oil, beeswax, charcoal, and soot on canvas with lodgepole
62 × 58 inches (157.5 × 147.3 cm)
Collection of Timothy C. Headington

*Ronan Robe #2*, 1977
Oil, beeswax, charcoal, and soot on canvas with lodgepole
72 × 52 inches (182.9 × 132.1 cm)
Yellowstone Art Museum, Billings, MT

*Cree Prayer Series #1*, 1978
Acrylic and pastel on paper
22 × 15 inches (55.9 × 38.1 cm)

*Cree Prayer Series #2*, 1978
Acrylic and pastel on paper
22 × 15 inches (55.9 × 38.1 cm)

*Cree Prayer Series #3*, 1978
Acrylic and pastel on paper
22 × 15 inches (55.9 × 38.1 cm)

*Cree Prayer Series #4*, 1978
Acrylic, pastel, and collage on paper
29 × 23 inches (73.7 × 58.4 cm)

*Cree Prayer Series #5*, 1978
Acrylic, pastel, and collage on paper
29 × 23 inches (73.7 × 58.4 cm)

Unless noted otherwise, all works courtesy the Estate of Jaune Quick-to-See Smith and Garth Greenan Gallery, New York

## MARY SULLY

Yankton Dakota; born 1896 at Standing Rock Reservation, SD; died 1963 in Omaha, NE

*Admiral Byrd*, ca. late 1920s–early 1940s
Colored pencil, graphite, and watercolor on paper

*Amelia Earhart*, ca. late 1920s–early 1940s
Colored pencil, graphite, and watercolor on paper

*Annie Stein*, ca. late 1920s–early 1940s
Colored pencil and graphite on paper

*Bishop Hare*, ca. late 1920s–early 1940s
Colored pencil, graphite, and watercolor on paper

*Beryl Markham*, ca. late 1920s–early 1940s
Colored pencil, graphite, and watercolor on paper

*Bob Ripley*, ca. late 1920s–early 1940s
Colored pencil, graphite, and watercolor on paper

*Edison*, ca. late 1920s–early 1940s
Colored pencil, graphite, ink, silver paint, and watercolor on paper

*Ernest Schelling*, ca. late 1920s–early 1940s
Colored pencil, graphite, and watercolor on paper

*Nila Cram Cook*, ca. late 1920s–early 1940s
Colored pencil, graphite, and watercolor on paper

All works three parts, top: 12 7/8 × 18 inches (32.7 × 45.7 cm); middle: 12 × 19 inches (30.5 × 48.3 cm); bottom: 9 1/2 × 12 inches (24.1 × 30.5 cm)
All works courtesy the Mary Sully Foundation

## ANNA TSOUHLARAKIS

Navajo, Creek, and Greek; born 1977 in Lawrence, KS

*IF SHE WAS AT THE PARTY, SHE WOULD HAVE DUMPED MORE THAN TEA*, 2025
IKEA remnants, aspen, birch, maple, ice pick pole, oars, boat fenders, metal, leather, artificial sinew, tobacco lids, press-on nails, steer horns, artificial elk teeth, horsehair, basketball rim, paint, adhesives, plaster, bed frame, plastic, elk hide, screws, nails, helmet face guard, buffalo nickels, and found book
Installed dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist

## KAY WALKINGSTICK

Cherokee and Anglo; born 1935 in Syracuse, NY

*Apron Agitato*, 1974
Acrylic on canvas
42 × 48 inches (106.7 × 121.9 cm)
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Gift of Laura Delaney Taft and John Taft, 2024

*Chief Joseph Series*, 1974–76
Acrylic, beeswax, and varnish on canvas
27 panels, each 20 × 15 inches (50.8 × 38.1 cm)
National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC

*Archetypal Image*, 1975
Acrylic and ink on canvas
42 × 52 × 1 1/2 inches (106.7 × 132.1 × 3.8 cm)
Courtesy the artist and Hales, London and New York

Sandra and Gerald Fineberg Art Wall
September 27, 2025–January 18, 2027

## CAROLINE MONNET

*Man-made Land*, 2025
Polyethylene, synthetic roofing underlayment, radiant barrier solar attic foil reflective, inkjet on synthetic flashspun high-density polyethylene, and thread
Courtesy the artist

Support for *Man-made Land* is generously provided by Jean-François and Nathalie Ducrest.

*Man-made Land* was developed with the support of the B Street Collaborative and the Conseil des arts de Montréal

COVER George Longfish, *Take Two Aspirins and Call Me in the Morning, You Are on Target* (detail), 1984

An Indigenous Present
October 9, 2025 – March 8, 2026

Organized by Jeffrey Gibson and Jenelle Porter, guest curators, with Erika Umali, Curator of Collections, and Max Gruber, Curatorial Assistant.

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QUOTES, IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

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Teresa Baker in conversation with Jenelle Porter, July 24, 2024.

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"Vantage Point—Kay WalkingStick, Chief Joseph series (1974–77)," posted August 5, 2011, by Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mAGkd0m7BAQ

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PHOTO CREDITS

Sully: Charles Mayer Photography; Baker: Ruben Diaz; Longfish: Cleber Bonato; WalkingStick: NMAI Photo Services; Smith: ShootART/Christopher Burke Studios; Murray: Olympia Shannon (installation view, *a clear veil*, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, April 5–May 25, 2025); Metchewais: NMAI Photo Services; Hill: Vuk Dragojevic.


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