

# Art Trunk *Jeffrey Gibson: The Body Electric*



Jeffrey Gibson. *THE LAND IS SPEAKING | ARE YOU LISTENING*, 2022. Courtesy of the artist. Image courtesy of the artist and SITE Santa Fe. Photo: Shayla Blatchford

Jeffrey Gibson (b. 1972), a member of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw and of Cherokee descent, is a celebrated **multidisciplinary** artist whose practice fuses painting, sculpture, film, video, and Indigenous traditions of adornment and performance. His unique intertribal approach to art making integrates materials and aesthetics of Indigenous cultures, such as fringe, glass beads, rawhide drums, and metal jingle cones with modernist explorations of color, form, and scale. He is inspired by a multitude of sources, such as literature, poetry, song lyrics, pop music, jazz, punk, politics, fashion, geometric design, Queer identities, pow-wows, drag, and rave culture. Gibson often calls attention to “outsider-ness” through a celebration of nonconformity and the power of self-expression.

Painted directly on the wall, *THE LAND IS SPEAKING | ARE YOU LISTENING* depicts a landscape through bands of color and graphic text. The vibrant palette is inspired by both the

southwestern skies of the work’s commissioners in New Mexico and the lush landscapes of the Northeast, where the artist lives with his family. Gibson’s original text prompts us to consider how the earth communicates with us and subtly expresses frustration with those who abuse, neglect, and exploit the land.

## Questions

- Look closely and describe what you see in *THE LAND IS SPEAKING | ARE YOU LISTENING*. Identify colors and shapes and talk about how they come together to form a landscape.
- The text in the mural indicates that the land is speaking out of frustration and asks, “are you listening?” What do you think the land would have to say?
- Do you listen to the land and the environment around you? How so?
- What characteristics make Gibson’s landscape **abstract**?

## Vocabulary

- **Multidisciplinary**: using a variety of media and materials
- **Abstract**: art that is not a realistic depiction and uses elements like shape, form, and texture to represent something.



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## Abstract Geometric Landscape

### Objective

Participants will make colorful abstract landscapes composed of lines and geometric shapes.

### Materials

Cardstock

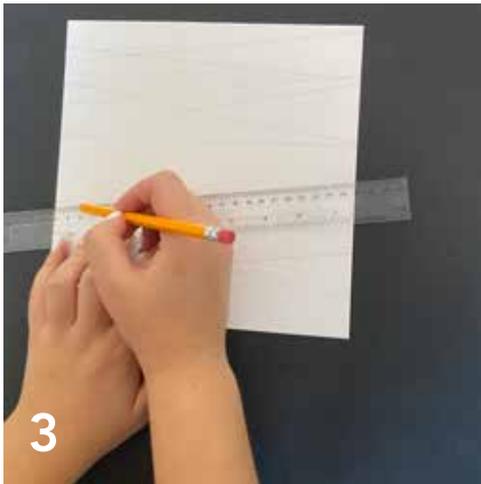
Ruler

Pencil

Colored adhesive tape

### Steps

1. Encourage participants to think about what they see in the landscape around them or when they look at pictures of landscapes. Ask what colors, lines, and shapes they observe.
2. Have participants consider a message they would like to share with others and how they will communicate that message through their landscapes.
3. Have participants start their landscapes by using a pencil and ruler to draw lines and simple geometric shapes on their cardstock. They should use basic shapes and not focus on fine details.
4. Have participants decide which colors they want to use. What natural elements are they depicting (sky, ground, water, hills, mountains, etc.)? What time of day?
5. Have participants use pieces of colored tape to fill in the lines and shapes that they have sketched. They may cut, overlap, and layer pieces of tape to complete their landscapes.
6. Have everyone share their finished landscapes and talk about their design choices.



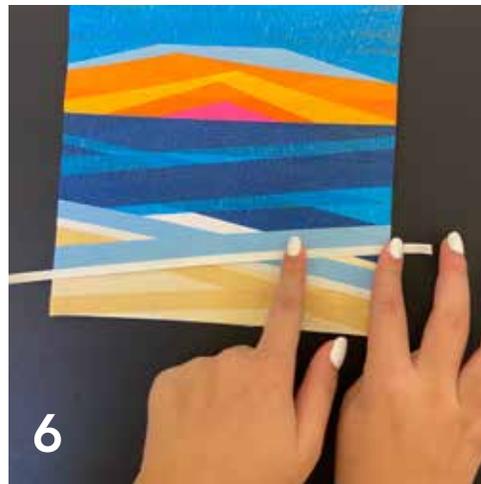
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# Art Trunk *Jeffrey Gibson: The Body Electric*



Jeffrey Gibson. *BETTER BECAUSE WE CAN BE*, 2022. Gochman Family Collection. Image courtesy of the artist. Photo: Max Yawney

Jeffrey Gibson uses a variety of materials, including beads, paint, and fabric to create colorful, rhythmic works of art. In *BETTER BECAUSE WE CAN BE*, Gibson uses repetition of color, line, and shape to create **patterns** in his quilt block paintings. The repetition of these elements creates **rhythm** within the work.

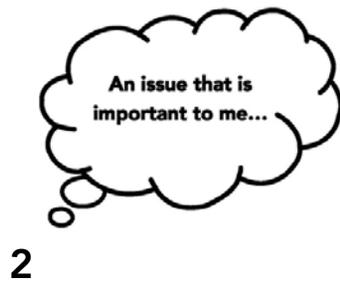
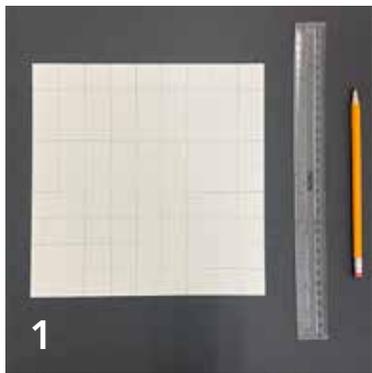
Blossoming from the artist's personal history of making and collecting quilts, these paintings build on quilting's ability to marry otherwise disparate influences to tell a story about comparisons, histories, and gaps. In juxtaposing sixteen sections of text, image, patterning, and several distinct periods and styles of beadwork, these multifaceted artworks explore the ebb and flow of connection, dislocation, and reconnection.

## Questions

- Look closely and describe what you see in *BETTER BECAUSE WE CAN BE*. Which patterns catch your eye first? Why?
- Jeffrey Gibson often incorporates questions or statements into his work. Sometimes he uses parts of a poem or song lyrics. Here, you will see that his words are in bold, colorful geometric designs. Why do you think he adds words to his artwork?

## Vocabulary

- Pattern: an artistic design or form characterized by repeated elements such as lines, shapes, and colors
- Rhythm: consistent recurrence of elements such as lines, shapes, and colors that imply movement or flow within an artwork



## Collaborative Quilt

### Objective

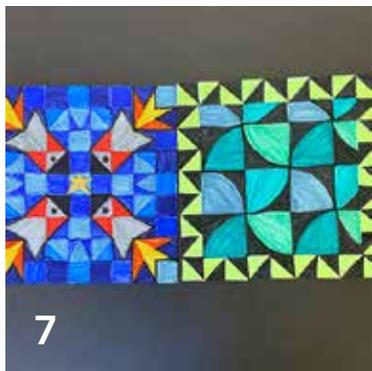
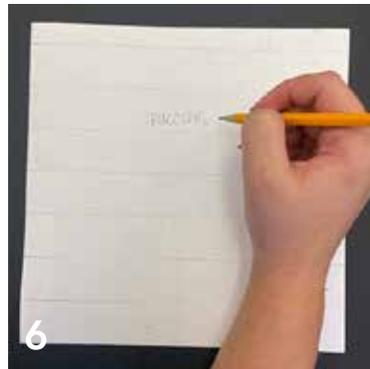
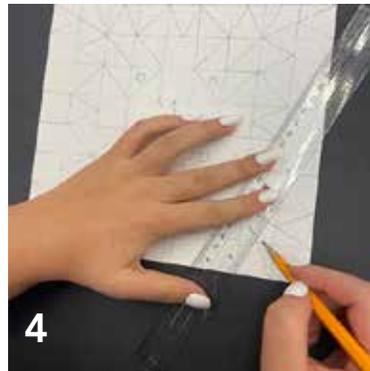
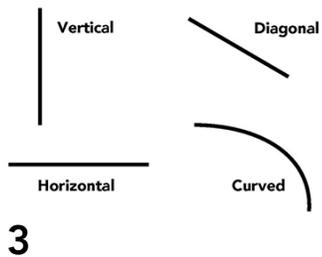
Participants will create rhythmic geometric patterns inspired by Jeffrey Gibson's quilt squares.

### Materials

Gridded watercolor paper  
Pencil  
Ruler  
Markers  
Assorted fabrics

### Steps

1. Give each participant a pencil, ruler, and gridded watercolor paper. Have them look closely at the patterns, colors, and composition of Jeffrey Gibson's *BETTER BECAUSE WE CAN BE*.
2. Encourage individuals to think about an issue that is important to them or something they want to communicate about themselves.
3. After determining what they want to communicate, participants should think about design choices like the types of lines and shapes they will use to make their patterns. Curved lines are dynamic and more organic than straight lines, which are more static and formal. Vertical lines show strength and authority while horizontal lines often convey calm. Diagonal lines are active and reflect movement.
4. Have participants use gridded paper, a pencil, and a ruler to make line drawings of patterns, using the grid lines to guide the placement of lines and geometric shapes.
5. After drawing on the entire grid, participants should think about the colors and textures they want to add using markers and assorted fabrics. Repeating colors and textures is another way to create a pattern. They may consider warm colors like yellow, orange, and red, or cool colors like blue, purple, and green. They may use fabrics that look different and feel different to the touch.
6. After they finish coloring and gluing their fabric pieces, have each participant think of a title for their pattern and write it on the back. This may be a word or phrase.
7. Have the group collaborate to make one or more quilts by assembling their patterns. Arrange them on a table, the floor, or tape them to a wall and have participants talk about their messages, design choices, and titles. Take a photograph of the assembled quilt before returning individual patterns to participants.



## Resources

Frist online resources for children:

*Art Is All Around You: Patterns in Nature:* <https://fristartmuseum.org/resource/patterns-in-nature/>

*Art Is All Around You: Rhythm in Art:* <https://fristartmuseum.org/resource/rhythm-in-art/>

Online resources for all ages:

Audio Guide (ASL); SITE Santa Fe: <https://sitesantafe.org/the-body-electric-gallery-guide-asl/>

Audio Guide (English); SITE Santa Fe: <https://sitesantafe.org/the-body-electric-gallery-guide/>

Audio Guide (Spanish); SITE Santa Fe: <https://sitesantafe.org/the-body-electric-guia-de-la-galeria/>

*Jeffrey Gibson: This Is the Day;* Wellin Museum of Art: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vF-T7QK\\_iE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vF-T7QK_iE)

*Meet the Artist: Jeffrey Gibson | Whitney Biennial 2019;* Whitney Museum of American Art: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RICuRySf8Pk>

*Jeffrey Gibson, Visual Artist, 2019 MacArthur Fellow;* MacArthur Foundation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7bKeGcpqXQ>

Books for children:

*We Are Water Protectors,* written by Carole Lindstrom and illustrated by Michaela Goade

*Color Dance,* written and illustrated by Ann Jonas

*We Are Grateful: Otsaliheliga,* written by Traci Sorell and illustrated by Frané Lessac

*Opposites Abstract,* written and illustrated by Mo Willems

The Seattle Art Museum provides a comprehensive list of books for children and adults on a variety of related topics:

<https://seattleartmuseum.org/Documents/jeffrey-gibson-recommended-reading-list.pdf>