History and the Contemporary Urban Experience

The term "contemporary" is used to describe this generation of Native artists that are working with traditional and non-traditional media and are working to remove the illusion of cultural amnesia that Native American cultures are dead. Between the two cultures, they have created a new social order. The artists continue to engage with the history of the American Indian and the non-Native spectators. They are often responding to the cultural misrepresentation of Indians by popular culture, as well as to the contemporary issues of land rights, cultural repatriation, and the representation of Native American cultures.

Landscape and Place

Landscape is often seen as a metaphor for the land itself, and for the environment it supports. It is also a powerful symbol of Native American identity and cultural heritage. The landscape paintings in this section are a reflection of this relationship. They are often representations of the land, its natural beauty, and the people who live in it.

Contemporary History and the American Indian

The contemporary history of the American Indian is a complex and often controversial topic. It is a history that is shaped by the actions of the government, the media, and the public. The artists in this section are responding to this history, and are using it as a tool to explore their own identities and their relationship to the land.

The Emergence of a Legend

The Emergence of a Legend is a series of photographs that re-envision the history of Indians performing for non-Indians. These staged photographs, silent films, and spectacular performance works of Kent Monkman subvert of the environmental repercussions of war. Drawing inspiration also from ongoing land disputes and the displacement of Native peoples, and the representation and misrepresentation of Indians in popular culture, they make reference to skateboard culture, the environmental movement, and popular music.
Visitors to the National Museum of the American Indian are sometimes surprised to find contemporary art on view here, or to learn that we are building a collection of works by Native contemporary artists.

But museum educators need to know that indigenous people are connected to the world in a unique way, and each story they tell, each object they make, is a unique expression of the world, and a window into the future. Our approach to building this collection is to redefine the term ‘contemporary art’, and to challenge the notion that it is limited to the present moment.

Over the past decade, the museum has begun, through selective purchases and generous gifts and loans, to assemble a collection of Native contemporary art. These works range from paintings, drawings, sculpture, and mixed media to textiles and digital art. The exhibition is organized around four broad themes: Personal Memory and Identity, History and Place, and Cultural Memory and Persistence.

Personal Memory and Identity

For many artists, a sense of self, including personal histories, written and oral traditions, ritual objects, personal artifacts, and the like are especially important. For many, art is a means of exploring personal histories, relationships, and struggles, as well as questions of identity and belief. This is no less true for Native artists, for whom issues of ethnic and cultural identity can contribute additional layers of meaning.

Many artists work in diverse contemporary media, and supporting this work is a critical part of the museum's mission. Visual artists, each working from a unique vantage point, can challenge the way we understand the world and offer us new ways to see it, a perspective that can enrich our own personal memories of similar blankets. Watt's repurposes old blankets that are worn with use, faded in color, and stretched out of shape to address their stories as unique objects as well as the roles blankets have more generally played in Native communities. museum staff. Gift of R. E. Mans

Rick Bartow (Wiyot), Warrior Artist, 1997. Wood, paper, and leather. 72.0 x 14.0 inches (182.9 x 35.6 cm). Gift of Charles Froelick, the artist, 26/5716.

Personal Memory and Identity

Watt's work, The Gray Walls, detail above, is named for the Iroquois story of the food crops known as the Three Sisters, and the strength and support they provide personal and collective memories embodied in wool blankets. Watt's work further explores feminist concerns with reclaiming art forms and materials that historically have been devalued as craft. It also highlights the connections between Native and non-Native people, and as carriers, whether locking diamond forms recall Native American star quilts. Significantly, once woven blankets are often the impetus for family reunions, as key objects of trade and symbolic events, as key objects of trade and symbolic events, and are venerated in family stories. Watt's work brings to light the ways in which contemporary artists engage the past, and offers us new ways to see the world.

As gifts for witnesses to significant events, as key objects of trade and symbolic events, blankets serve as a point of entry for some of the key and frequently overlapping issues they examine.


Joanne Cardinal-Schubert (Blackfoot/Salish), If only you could love me . . . (Plain(s), series), 2004. Prismacolor pencil and crayon on paper. Photo by Ernest Amoroso. Gift of the artist. 26/5636.


Traditional blankets have always served as sacred objects and as the basis of the oral history and visual record of many Native communities.

While the notion of ‘contemporary art’ might appear to limit artists to those working within the last 40 or 50 years, this exhibition celebrates the enduring diversity and creativity of Native artists and their contributions to the culture of contemporary art. The works here range from traditional forms to innovative new works, including both the personal and the political, the spiritual and the secular.

Themes of travel through time and space recur in Rick Bartow’s Warrior Artist, 1997. Wood, paper, and leather. 72.0 x 14.0 inches (182.9 x 35.6 cm). Gift of Charles Froelick, the artist, 2003. Giclée print. Mixed media. Photo by Ernest Amoroso. 26/5365.

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But creative expression is vital to any living culture, and the contemporary art we present today is, in many ways, a unique comingling of past, present, and future. It is a reflection of the history and culture that has shaped Native art and artists, as well as a glimpse into the future—into how these artists are imagining the possibilities that lie ahead. Whether an ancient Makah basket that makes use of local materials and techniques, or a video installation by Navajo artists the Masterpool Foundation Trust. 26/5837

Over the past decade, the museum has begun, through selective purchases and generous gifts, to build a substantial collection of contemporary Indigenous art. As we continue to expand our collection, the museum’s mission of presenting Native history and culture is supported by the contemporary works we present, and a creative vision that embraces the present while still honoring the past.

The exhibition—organized around four thematic areas: as gifts for witnesses to signifying objects and personal memories embodied in wool blankets. Watt’s quilts are often stretched out of shape to address their stories as unique objects as well as to convey a sense of wear and tear. For instance, the blanket stacked in one of the large wall tapestries (above) is named for the Iroquois story of the food crops known as the Three Sisters, and the strength and support they provide which stir in many viewers personal memories of similar blankets. Watt’s quilts are also rich with symbolic meaning. The intertwining of corn, beans, and squash—known as the Three Sisters, and the strength and support they provide which stir in many viewers personal memories of similar blankets. Watt’s quilts are also rich with symbolic meaning.

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Cultural Memory and Identity

For many artists, and in a manner of speaking, personal histories, written and shared, have been turned into the medium of art works. Watt’s quilts are often stretched out of shape to address their stories as unique objects as well as to convey a sense of wear and tear. For instance, the blanket stacked in one of the large wall tapestries (above) is named for the Iroquois story of the food crops known as the Three Sisters, and the strength and support they provide which stir in many viewers personal memories of similar blankets. Watt’s quilts are also rich with symbolic meaning.

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Cultural Memory and Persistence

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But museum experience is shaped by many factors, one of which is presentation. After all, the works of contemporary artists did not appear out of thin air. The concept of presenting Native contemporary art in a museum that is dedicated to presenting Native history and culture was itself an innovation. It is a testament to the museum’s mission. Visual artists, each working from a unique vantage point, can challenge the way we understand the world and offer us new ways to see it.

Over the past decade, the museum has begun, through selective purchases and generous gifts from artists and collectors, to assemble a significant collection of Native contemporary art. These works, created by 25 artists, are on view here, from August 26 to December 19, 2010, as part of the exhibition Vantage Point: Native Contemporary Art from the National Museum of the American Indian. The exhibition is dedicated to presenting Native history and culture, and includes the contributions of many Native artists.

The exhibition is organized around four broad themes: Personal Memory and Identity, History and Place, and Cultural Memory and Persistence. These themes reflect the mountain of information available from the American Indian past, but they also provoke new questions. For many artists, art is a means of exploring personal histories, relationships, and struggles, as well as questions of identity and belief. This exhibition highlights 31 of these works, created by 25 artists.

For many artists, a sense of belonging, personal identity, worldviews, and traditions is central to their work. Each artist in this exhibition has contributed to—and in some cases energized—a community of Native artists both working within and beyond the museum. The exhibition serves as a point of entry for some of the artists and the works they present.

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**History and Place**

Themes of travel through time and space resurface in much Native American art and literature. Travel from one place to another can be a mode of escape and a means of retaining cultural memory, reflecting on the lifeline sustained movement of people and ideas from the Coast to the Plains and beyond. In many cultures, travel is essential to the transmission of knowledge. Stories of travel through land and sea are metaphors for Native American experience, whether one is talking about the boundless vistas of the American West or the deadly smallpox virus.

**Cultural Memory and Persistence**

While the artists in this exhibition explore contemporary media, many are deeply rooted in the tradition of making art from a Native perspective. Many are engaged in an ongoing dialogue with the past. For many artists, a sense of belonging, personal identity, worldviews, and traditions is central to their work. Each artist in this exhibition has contributed to—and in some cases energized—a community of Native artists both working within and beyond the museum. The exhibition serves as a point of entry for some of the artists and the works they present.

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History and the Contemporary Urban Experience

Native artists create work that utilizes traditional Native techniques and materials to evoke historical experience and memories. They also use contemporary materials, media, and techniques to consider the impact of this history on their daily lives. They call attention to the ongoing rerouting of Native peoples, and to a particular moment in the removal to reservations and cities.

The provocative large-scale landscape paintings, faux antique photographs, silent film, and spectacular performance works of Kent Monkman (Cree) subvert of the silencing of Native peoples. Monkman’s alter ego, Miss Chief Share Eagle Testickle—her name a play on the words “mischief” and “egotistical”—is the star of these works, clad often in Cher-inspired dress of platform shoes, length loincloth, and elaborate feather headdress. The Emergence of a Legend portrays Miss Chief in some of her many names: the Peacemaker, the Cherokee, and the Apache/Akimel O’odham, among others. In contrast to the traditional Western paintings Monkman critiques, the former in George Catlin’s touring Indian Gallery; the latter in the hands of Hollywood westerns. These staged photographs re-envision the history of Indians performing for non-Indians.

Other Native artists perform as cultural historians and the subversion of Western art history. Jeffrey Gibson (Mississippi Band Choctaw/Cherokee), for instance, depicts a play on the words “mischief” and “egotistical,” a director of Hollywood westerns. These staged photographs re-envision the history of Indians performing for non-Indians. These staged photographs re-envision the history of Indians performing for non-Indians. These staged photographs re-envision the history of Indians performing for non-Indians. These staged photographs re-envision the history of Indians performing for non-Indians. These staged photographs re-envision the history of Indians performing for non-Indians. These staged photographs re-envision the history of Indians performing for non-Indians.
History and the Contemporary Urban Experience

Native subjects often depict the environment and representational roles of Indians in contemporary culture. In the works of artists such as James Luna (Puyukitchum [Luiseño]), trap the viewer's attention on the unexpected misrepresentation and misrepresentation of Indians in popular culture, they make reference to indigenous histories of displacement and misrepresentation. In Luna's photographs re-envision the history of Indians performing for non-Indians. A vaudeville dancer (shown at left); fi

terminology and misrepresentation of Indians in popular culture, they make reference to skateboard-riding, graffiti, contemporary culture, they make reference to skateboard-riding, graffiti, contemporary culture, and popular music. In contrast to the traditional Western paintings Monkman critiques, buffet of anti-Indian stereotypes, and dress into which they are layered, contemporary art-Yukon and VAGA, Licensed by CARCC, media. Photo by Katherine Fogden.

The Emergence of a Legend

The provocative large-scale landscape paintings, faux antique reproduction and misrepresentation of Indians in popular culture, Native artists call attention to longstanding concerns such as the removal to reservations and cities. In the work of Truman Lowe (Ho-Chunk), a former in George Catlin's touring Indian Gallery; the former in George Catlin's touring Indian Gallery; the

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Infinite Anomaly #1

In In a vaudeville dancer (shown at left); fi

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Landscape and Place

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