

The Contemporary Native Art Collection

# vantage point



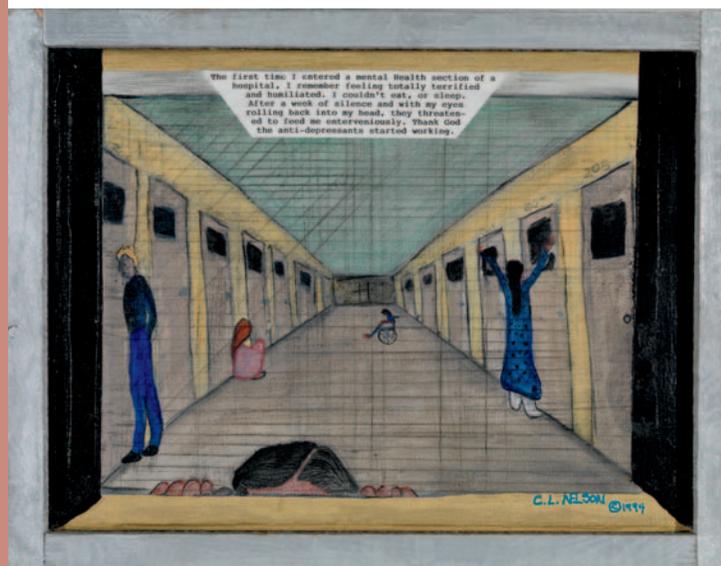
Visitors to the National Museum of the American Indian are sometimes surprised to find contemporary art on view here, or to learn that we are building a collection of works by Native contemporary artists.

But creative expression is vital to any living culture, 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 contribution that is especially appropriate in a museum dedicated to presenting Native history and culture.

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 range from paintings, drawings, sculpture, and photography to video projection and mixed-media installations. While still young and relatively small, this collection is substantial, with complex, richly layered artworks that address a broad array of issues from personal and informed perspectives.

*Vantage Point* highlights 31 of these works, created by 25 artists. The exhibition is organized around four broad themes: Personal Memory and Identity, History and the Contemporary Urban Experience, Landscape and Place, and Cultural Memory and Persistence. While many of the works resist categorization, this framework serves as a point of entry for some of the key and frequently overlapping issues they examine.

—Rebecca Head Trautmann, Exhibition Curator



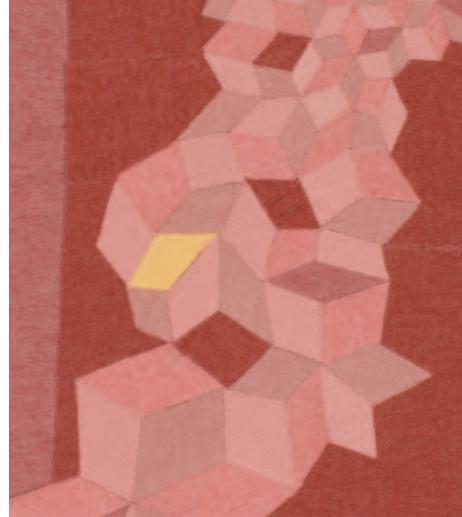
Catherine Nelson-Rodriguez (Luiseño/Wailaki/Choctaw), *The Gray Walls*, 1994. Oil and collaged paper on canvas. Photo by Ernest Amoroso. 26/7246



Star Wallowing Bull (Minnesota White Earth Band of Chippewa), *Once upon a Time . . .*, 2004. Prismacolor pencil and crayon on paper. Photo by Ernest Amoroso. Gift of the artist. 26/5636



Rosalie Favell (Cree Métis), *If only you could love me . . . (Plain(s) Warrior Artist series)*, 2003. Giclée print. Photo by Ernest Amoroso. 26/5816



Marie Watt (Seneca), *In the Garden (Corn, Beans, Squash)* (detail), 2003. Reclaimed wool blankets, satin bindings, and thread. Photo by Ernest Amoroso. 26/5807



Nora Naranjo-Morse (Santa Clara Pueblo), *Stories upon Stories*, 2005. Cast aluminum. Photo by Ernest Amoroso. Museum purchase with funds donated by David and Sara Lieberman, Larry Goldstone, and the Masterpool Foundation Trust. 26/5837

Mario Martinez (Pascua Yaqui), *Yaqui Flashback II*, 1991. Acrylic and mixed media on canvas. Photo by Ernest Amoroso. Gift of Bill Rosenfeld and Suzanne M. Rubel. 26/5365



# Personal Memory and Identity

For many artists, 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.

In large wall tapestries, towering blanket stacks, small stitched samplers, and complex installations, Marie Watt (Seneca) explores the personal and collective memories embodied in wool blankets. Watt 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: as gifts for witnesses to significant events, as key objects of trade between Native and non-Native people, and as carriers, whether intentionally or not, of the deadly smallpox virus.

Watt's work *In the Garden (Corn, Beans, Squash)* (shown on the cover, detail above) is named for the Iroquois story of the food crops known as the Three Sisters, and the strength and support they provide to one another when planted together. The intertwined strands climbing skyward suggest also the fall to earth of Sky Woman, and the interlocking diamond forms recall Native American star quilts. Significant as well are the tactile qualities of the wool and the worn satin bindings, which stir in many viewers personal memories of similar blankets. Watt's work further explores feminist concerns with reclaiming art forms and materials that historically have been devalued as craft.

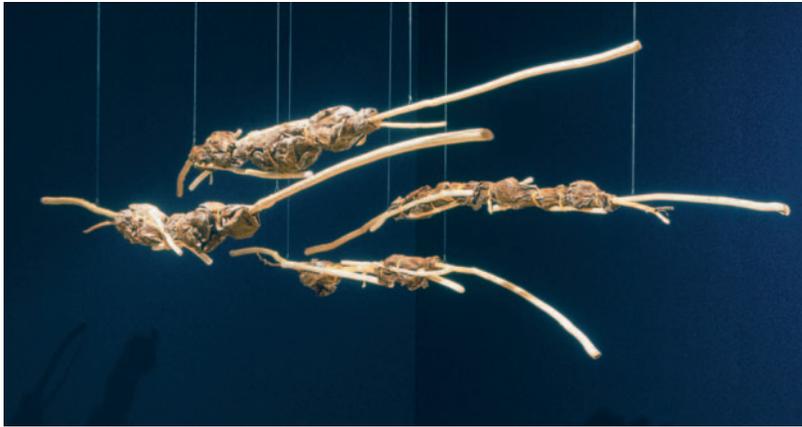


Lorenzo Clayton (Navajo), *Richard's 3rd Hand #16*, 1995. Mixed media. Photo by Ernest Amoroso. 26/5715



Judith Lowry (Hammawi Band Pit River/Mountain Maidu/Washo/Scottish-Irish/Australian), *Weh-Pom and the Star Sisters* (detail), 2004. Acrylic on canvas. Photo by Ernest Amoroso. 26/7502

Truman Lowe (Ho-Chunk), *Wah-Du-Sheh (Bundle)*, 1997. Wood, paper, and leather. Photo courtesy of the artist. 26/7724



## Cultural Memory and Persistence

While the artists in *Vantage Point* work in diverse contemporary media, many of their pieces are informed by cultural traditions that include visual art, oral histories, music, dance, and ritual. These traditions have continuing relevance for Native people today, and can be sources of strength, knowledge, and healing.

Truman Lowe's elegant sculptural works evoke both personal and cultural memory, reflecting on the Wisconsin woodland environment of his childhood and Ho-Chunk oral and cultural traditions. Raised along the Black River, Lowe is fascinated with moving water, and has transformed stripped willow branches and cut lumber into quiet streams, rushing rivers, and cascading waterfalls. Canoes, often filled with feathers or floating overhead, are another recurring subject in his work.

Themes of travel through time and space resurface in *Wah-Du-Sheh (Bundle)* (above). In this work, willow branches wrapped with crumpled brown paper and tied with strips of leather are suspended from above, suggesting the movement of objects packed for a journey. Lowe employs the form of the medicine bundle as a metaphor for the care with which we protect the things we hold dear.



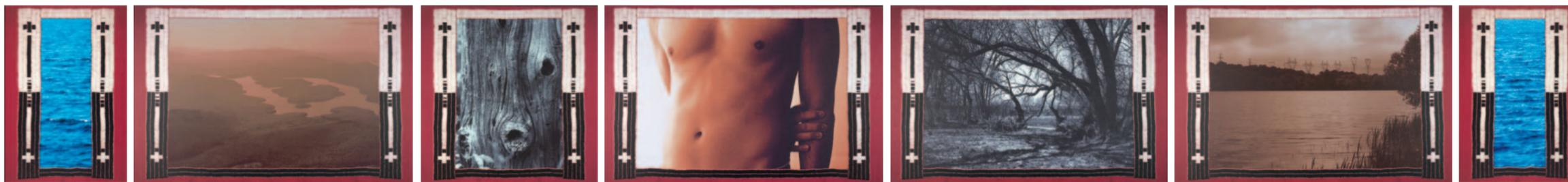
Joane Cardinal-Schubert (Blackfoot [Blood]), *Medicine Wheel-Nebula (Dream)-Glass-Bottom Boat*, 2000-06. Acrylic on canvas. Gift of the Province of Alberta and the Honorable Ralph Klein, Premier of Alberta. Photo by R. A. Whiteside. 26/5680

Margarete Bagshaw (Santa Clara Pueblo), *Sky Rise Dreams*, 2001. Oil on linen. Photo by NMAI Photo Services staff. Gift of R. E. Mansfield. 26/4466



Rick Bartow (Wiyot), *From the Mad River to the Little Salmon River, or The Responsibility of Raising a Child*, 2004-05. Bronze. Photo by Ernest Amoroso. Gift of Charles Froelick, the artist, and the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. 26/5716

Kay WalkingStick (Cherokee), *Chief Joseph* series (detail), 1974–77. Acrylic, wax, and ink on canvas. Photo by R. A. Whiteside. 26/5366



Shelley Niro (Bay of Quinte Mohawk), *La Pietà*, 2001–06. Digitized photo inkjet prints on canvas. Photo by Ernest Amoroso. 26/7463



Carlos Jacanamijoy (Inga), *A Rose in Tribute*, 2001. Oil on canvas. Photo by Walter Larrimore. Gift of the artist. 26/1565



James Luna (Puyukitchum [Luiseño]), *Chapel for Pablo Tac*, 2005. Mixed media. Photo by Katherine Fogden.



Kent Monkman (Cree), *The Emergence of a Legend* (detail), 2007. Digital print on metallic paper. Photo by Ernest Amoroso. 26/7171

## History and the Contemporary Urban Experience

Native artists call attention to longstanding concerns such as the representation and misrepresentation of Indians in popular culture, ongoing land disputes and the displacement of Native peoples, and the environmental repercussions of war. Drawing inspiration also from broader contemporary culture, they make reference to skateboarding, graffiti, urban architecture, and popular music.

The provocative large-scale landscape paintings, faux antique photographs, silent films, and spectacular performance works of Kent Monkman (Cree) subvert official histories of Manifest Destiny and noble savages. 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, floor-length loincloth, and elaborate feather headdress.

*The Emergence of a Legend* portrays Miss Chief in some of her many guises—a performer in George Catlin's touring Indian Gallery; the Trapper's Bride, an imagined performer in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show; a vaudeville dancer (shown at left); fictitious silent-film starlet Cindy Silverscreen; and a director of Hollywood westerns. These staged photographs re-envision the history of Indians performing for non-Indians.



Jeffrey Gibson (Mississippi Band Choctaw/Cherokee), *Infinite Anomaly #1*, 2004. Oil on paper. Photo by Ernest Amoroso. 26/5659



Douglas Miles (San Carlos Apache/Akimel O'odham), *Peacemaker*, 2004. Acrylic on wood (skateboard deck). Photo by Ernest Amoroso. 26/5954



Emmi Whitehorse (Navajo), *Standing Water*, 2002. Mixed media on paper, canvas. Photo by Ernest Amoroso. Museum purchase with funds donated by Dr. Marian Jacobs in memory of Dr. Myron S. Jacobs. 26/5557



Nadia Myre (Anishinaabe), *Indian Act* (page 27), 2000–03. Glass beads, Stroud cloth, acid-free paper, and masking tape. © Nadia Myre/Licensed by CARCC, Ontario and VAGA, New York. 26/7723

Will Wilson  
(Diné/  
Bilagaana),  
*Auto Immune  
Response #6*,  
2004. Archival  
inkjet print.  
Photo by Ernest  
Amoroso. 26/5817



## Landscape and Place

Landscapes are particularly meaningful subjects for many Native contemporary artists. This reflects both the vital bonds communities feel for their homelands and the disruptive effects of displacement and removal to reservations and cities.

In contrast to the traditional Western paintings Monkman critiques, in which landscapes are often portrayed as a means of mastering and laying claim to the land, Emmi Whitehorse's work reveals intimate personal and cultural knowledge and the lived experience of a place. Whitehorse's ethereal abstract paintings are inspired by observations of the landscape on the Navajo Reservation, where she was raised. As a child, she spent time walking with her grandmother, gathering the plants used to dye wool for weaving. The floating forms in many of Whitehorse's paintings evoke images of these plants hanging from the walls of the hogan to dry.

In *Standing Water* (at left), Whitehorse focuses the viewer's attention on the unexpected microscopic life teeming in a pool of water on the desert floor. Here she draws on her knowledge of printmaking—in which she has a master's degree—as she layers colors and marks onto the paper, working its surface and grinding the pigments into it with her hands.



Joe Feddersen (Colville Confederated Tribes [Okanagan/Lakes]),  
*Tire*, 2003. Sandblasted blown glass.  
Photo by Walter Larrimore. 26/2874



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*National Museum of the American Indian*

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clockwise from top right:

Truman Lowe (Ho-Chunk),  
*Wah-Du-Sheh (Bundle)*, 1997.  
Wood, paper, and leather.  
Photo courtesy of the artist.  
26/7124

Marie Watt (Seneca), *In  
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and thread. Photo by Ernest  
Amoroso. 26/5807

James Lavadour (Walla  
Walla), *Blanket*, 2005. Oil  
on board. Photo by Ernest  
Amoroso. Museum purchase  
with funds donated by  
Robert Jon Grover. 26/6079

Alan Michelson (Mohawk),  
*Mespat*, 2001. Digital video  
with sound, turkey feathers,  
monofilament, and steel  
cable; sound by Michael  
J. Schumacher. Photo by  
Gwendolyn Cates, courtesy  
of the artist. 26/5774

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