The Emergence of a Native Art Establishment, New York. 26/7723
Licensed by CARCC, tape. © Nadia Myre/
paper, and masking cloth, acid-free
Indian Act
Nadia Myre (Anishi-}
2005. Mixed
on canvas. Photo by Ernest Amoroso. 26/7463
Pieta,
2001–06. Digitized photo inkjet prints
Shelley Niro (Bay of Quinte Mohawk),
Legend
The provocative large-scale landscape paintings, faux antique
Silverscreen; and a director of Hollywood westerns. These staged pho-
a vaudeville dancer (shown at left);
fi
Trapper's Bride, an imagined performer in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show;
fi
a play on the words "mischief" and "egotistical"—is the star of
Monkman's alter ego, Miss Chief Share Eagle Testickle—her
subvert of
broader contemporary culture, they make reference to skateboard-
the environmental repercussions of war. Drawing inspiration also from
ongoing land disputes and the displacement of Native peoples, and
representation and misrepresentation of Indians in popular culture,
Native artists call attention to longstanding concerns such as the
Urban Experience
History and the
fi
lms, and spectacular performance works of Kent

Jeffrey Gibson (Mississippi Band Choctaw/Apache/Akimel O'odham),
2004. Acrylic on wood (skate-

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frightful silent-

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Visitors to the National Museum of the American Indian are sometimes surprised to find a collection of works by Native contemporary artists. But creative expression is vital to any living culture, and supporting this art is essential to the continued vitality of First Nation cultures. Many of the artists in this exhibition are young and still working from an indigenous perspective. The museum's mission is dedicated to presenting Native history and culture, and supporting this work is a critical part of the museum's role. 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 point of entry for some of the issues they examine.

While many of the works resist categorization, this exhibition is organized around four broad themes: Personal Memory and Identity, History and Place, and Cultural Memory and Persistence. Visitors to the National Museum of the American Indian are sometimes surprised to find a collection of works by Native contemporary artists. But creative expression is vital to any living culture, and supporting this art is essential to the continued vitality of First Nation cultures. Many of the artists in this exhibition are young and still working from an indigenous perspective. The museum's mission is dedicated to presenting Native history and culture, and supporting this work is a critical part of the museum's role. 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 point of entry for some of the issues they examine.

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Personal Memory and Identity

For many artists, art is a means of exploring personal histories, relationships, and struggles, as key objects of trade and commerce that historically have been devalued as craft. Work further explores feminist concerns with reclaiming art forms and materials that stir in many viewers personal memories of similar blankets. Watt's work, for example, as the roles blankets have more generally played in Native communities, is no less true for Native artists, for whom issues of ethnic and cultural identity can contribute additional layers of meaning.

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In large wall tapestries, towering blanket stacks, small stitched samplers, and complex installations, Marie Watt (Seneca) explores the strength and support that historically have been devalued as craft. Personal Memory and Place, and Cultural Memory and Persistence.

In the center, an elegant sculptural work by Truman Lowe (Ho-Chunk). In this work, willow branches wrapped with crum­pled brown paper and tied with strips of leather are suspended from the ceiling. The intertwined strands climb­ing skyward suggest also the fall to earth of Sky Woman, and the inter­twined strands of the Masterpool Foundation Trust. While the artists in this exhibition, whether Native or to learn that we are building contemporary art on view here, —Rebecca Head Trautmann, Exhibition Curator
Cultural Memory and Persistence

While the National Museum of American Indian's recent contemporary art exhibition, A Native Space: Visions of the Contemporary Urban Experience, Landscape and Place, and Cultural Memory and Persistence, focused on the contemporary art that hoced around the United States, it also explored 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 museum's mission, like a work of art, is always a work in progress. While many of the works resist categorization, this exhibition highlights 31 of these works, created by artists and collectors, to assemble a significant contribution that is especially appropriate in a museum dedicated to presenting Native history and culture. Over the past decade, the museum has begun, sometimes surprised to find, to look to its Native peoples, its partners, and its friends to acquire contemporary art from artists and collectors, to assemble a significant contribution that is especially appropriate in a museum dedicated to presenting Native history and culture.
History and the Contemporary Urban Experience

Native artists often use photography and printmaking to analyze the complexities and contradictions of life in major cities. By portraying images of Indian people in the urban environment, Native artists call attention to longstanding concerns such as the removal to reservations and cities. This recontextualization of traditional imagery in a modern context raises questions about the history and identity of urban Native people.

In works such as "Tire," Joe Feddersen (Colville Confederated Tribes [Okanagan/Lakes]) creates striking images that explore the relationship between Native people and their environment. The use of sandblasting and blown glass in "Tire" evokes images of Native people working in the desert landscape, where the contrast between natural and artificial materials is particularly striking.

Similarly, in "Standing Water," Walter Larrimore (Walla Walla) uses traditional Native American techniques to create a piece that speaks to the importance of water in Native cultures. The watercolor technique used in "Standing Water" is a traditional medium for Native people, and the piece evokes the natural beauty of the landscape through the use of vibrant colors.

These works, along with others in the exhibition, offer a glimpse into the diverse range of perspectives and approaches that Native artists use to explore the impact of urbanization on their communities.

Admission: free. The museum is closed December 25.

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**Landscape and Place**

Landscape and identity are entwined in the cultural expressions of Native American artists. Drawing from the rich tapestry of Native heritage, these artists explore the relationships between humans and their environment, and how these connections shape their identities and cultures. Their works often reflect a deep understanding of the natural world, the stories and histories passed down through generations, and the ongoing struggle to preserve this connection in the face of modernization.

Native artists frequently use traditional materials and techniques, such as cloth, thread, ink, and glass beads, to create pieces that are both aesthetically pleasing and deeply rooted in cultural significance. Many works incorporate themes of the natural world, including the landscape, flora, and fauna, to evoke a sense of place and evoke memories of the land.

For example, Gwendolyn Cates, a Navajo artist, creates ethereal abstract paintings that are inspired by the landscape of the Navajo Reservation, where she was raised. As a child, she observed the landscape and its vibrant life, from the colorful plants to the bustling animals. These observations are reflected in her work, which uses the landscape as a metaphor for the human experience—its beauty, fragility, and resilience.

Marie Watt, a Seneca artist, uses weaving to create pieces that respond to the land and its environment. Her handwoven wool blankets incorporate natural dyes from local plants and flowers, allowing her to create works that are not only visually stunning but also deeply connected to the land.

In conclusion, Native American artists use landscape as a lens through which to explore identity, history, and the ongoing relationship between humans and the environment. Their works serve as a bridge between past and present, connecting viewers to the rich cultural heritage of Native peoples.

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*Image credits: Photos courtesy of the artists. Museum purchase with funds donated by Dr. Marian Mespat.*