

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 and Native American artists is made with, looks like, and sounds like.

This exhibition emerges from the 2023 publication *An Indigenous Present*, which surveyed the contemporary arts across a diverse field of Native 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

An Indigenous Present is organized by Jeffrey Gibson and Jenelle Porter, guest curators, with Erika Umali, Curator of Collections, and Max Gruber, Curatorial Assistant.

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Section 1

Section 1

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

Minnesota Museum of American Art, St. Paul. Gift of the artist

After graduating from the Minneapolis School of Art in 1943, George Morrison moved to New York City to study painting at the Art Students League. There, he learned from and contributed to an avant-garde community seeking novel forms of expression. Morrison's earliest biomorphic abstractions aligned with prevailing trends of surrealism, Dadaism, and cubism, and by 1950, with abstract expressionism. By the early 1960s, he was using thickly applied oils straight from the tube to make "one-shot" paintings that combined aspects of abstract expressionist and color field painting. Morrison would devote the next fifty years to a pursuit of abstraction, the phenomena of paint, and the creation of "endless space."

George Morrison

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

From right to left:

Untitled: Abstract Drawing, 1951

Wash and ink on paper

Courtesy Bockley Gallery, Minneapolis

Untitled, 1957

Gouache on paper

Private collection; courtesy Bockley Gallery, Minneapolis

The Fire Next Time, 1980

Oil on canvas on board in artist's frame

Collection of Alice Silha Reimann and Stephen Silha;
courtesy Bockley Gallery, Minneapolis

From top to bottom:

Quiet Passage, Approaching Night. Red Rock Variation: Lake Superior Landscape, 1993

Evening Layer. Signs of the Jasper. Red Rock Variation: Lake Superior Landscape, 1995

Acrylic on canvas on board in artist's frame

Collection of George Morrison Estate; courtesy Bockley
Gallery, Minneapolis

In 1970, Morrison returned to Minneapolis to teach at the University of Minnesota. His work reflected the changes in his life and location. Adapting his life-long adherence to automatic mark-making, he began to incorporate place as both subject and motif. In his last years Morrison initiated a series of more than sixty paintings of which this is one. The artist's frame differentiates the painted surface and natural wood with a metallic sliver of shimmer.

Mary Sully

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

In the late 1920s, Mary Sully (born Susan Mabel Deloria) began a series of imaginative portraits she called “personality prints.” Each colorful portrait is characterized by abstract motifs and sophisticated patterning in which Sully fused her fascinations with popular culture, and her knowledge of Native American and modern art forms. Sully was a quintessential cosmopolitan figure of her era: an educated woman, an artist working within both Native American and Anglo-European visual traditions, and a Dakota citizen who moved between midwestern towns and eastern cities. She began the “personality prints” during an era in which modernist abstraction, art deco, art nouveau, and Native American art accrued public attention and international exhibitions. Largely self-taught, she worked in relative isolation, lived most of her life with her sister and was, by all accounts, shy and reserved. But she was an enthusiastic consumer of popular culture and creative expression, which she channeled into an extraordinary body of drawings. Because her heritage narrowed her access to mainstream art realms, and her style diverged so sharply from the dominant strains of “Indian Art,” Sully received neither patronage nor recognition during her lifetime. Now, her dazzling drawings have come to be recognized as a monumental achievement — for her time and for the present.

All works courtesy The Mary Sully Foundation

Edison, ca. late 1920s–early 1940s

Colored pencil, graphite, ink, silver paint, and watercolor on paper

Thomas Edison (1847–1931) patented the phonograph, the motion picture camera, and, most notably, the electric light bulb. Mary Sully's portrayal of Edison is among her most abstract works. While the top panel is a static shape — perhaps the glowing filament of an electric light — the pinwheel patterning in the second panel suggests machine motion. Sully's use of rotational symmetry and whirling shapes also draw from Dakota star quilts and porcupine quill medallions, two art forms made by Plains women. The artist's sister Ella Deloria, an anthropologist and linguist, described quillwork as “the original art...*the art*” of Native women.

Bob Ripley, ca. late 1920s–early 1940s

Colored pencil, graphite, and watercolor on paper

Robert Ripley (1890–1949) was an American cartoonist famous for his sensationalistic entertainment invention *Believe It or Not!* — a comic book, newspaper column, radio program, and television series, as well as museum exhibits (or “odditoriums”), that exaggerated odd facts and stories from around the world. Mary Sully draws an arena circled by spotlights, binoculars, and a looped shape — perhaps a magnifying glass for sleuthing. These symbolize the circus-like spectacle of Ripley’s media empire. Indeed, in the middle panel Sully’s pattern evokes multiplying arenas. In the bottom panel, she squares the circles into rectilinear designs replete with hexagons that resemble beadwork and quilts.

Admiral Byrd, ca. late 1920s–early 1940s

Colored pencil, graphite, and watercolor on paper

Richard Byrd Jr. (1888–1957) was a pioneering aviator, explorer, and U.S. naval officer who conducted Arctic and Antarctic expeditions during the 1920s and '30s. His maiden flights over the poles earned him international celebrity. In the top panel, Mary Sully juxtaposes gray and white jagged peaks and valleys—perhaps instrument panel readings, icicles, or snowcapped heights, such as Mount Sidley in Antarctica, which Byrd discovered in 1934 — with an elevation of geometric shapes that, accounting for Byrd's rank, resemble military insignia. Sully draws an undulating pattern of stacked colors that, like all of the middle panels in her personality prints, is drawn to the edge of the paper. The bottom panel features a bilateral pattern of lines, triangles, and diamonds that proliferate as positive and negative space.

George Morrison

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

Untitled, 1962

Oil on canvas

Collection of Barbara Pereyima-Farrara

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.

— George Morrison

Section 2

The subject is the land, the earthscape, but [these are] not pictures of a place.

—Kay WalkingStick

Ground is the term for a surface that has been prepared for painting. Put another way, a ground is a receiving surface, a place for making. A ground is a timekeeper, recording actions that have taken place on its surface. Ground is also land, and we conflate the two in order to complicate conceptions of land as both generative subject and visual motif. The works in this gallery express the ways artists use abstraction to picture sense memories, places, and histories. Abstraction is used as an infinitely flexible tool to obscure, to symbolize and signify, and to depict ephemeral conditions.

Raven Chacon

Diné; born 1977 at Fort Defiance, Navajo Nation

***Compass*, 2021**

Score

Courtesy the artist

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.

—Raven Chacon

Central to Raven Chacon's multivalent work is site and setting: "I think of my compositions as a long-time study of . . . the dynamics of the musicians in a context: who they are, where they are geographically, the specific site in which they are performing, and the history of that site and its surrounding geography." These contextual dynamics, and their presence in his work as a composer and musician, are fundamental to how we see, hear, and read Chacon's works. *Compass* is a composition for a solo performer on an overly amplified guitar, to be played outdoors. As presented on the wall, *Compass* is a graphic picture that functions as a fixed position that grounds the artworks it hangs alongside.

For overly amplified electric guitar, distortion options, and wah pedal or tone controls.

To be performed (or prepared) in an outdoors open space or field or desert.

Slowly turn up the volume of the amplifier.

Starting with the first prompt circle (Pitch), choose a note/chord type. Sound the tone(s) and sustain them, constantly shaking the guitar if necessary.

Next choose if this tone is to be I, III, or V of a harmonic progression.

Next choose a rhythmic/tone-altering technique and perform it while still sustaining the tone.

When the tone is no longer sustainable, choose a transitional gesture and perform it to restart the cycle of prompts.

To choose the next note type and relative harmonic position where the note will occur, pay attention to the direction that the wind is blowing. This will decide for you to choose the option that is clockwise or counter-clockwise to the first choices. Perform the new pitch(es) in their appropriate positions.

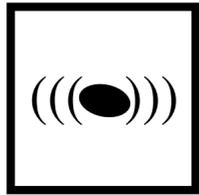
To choose the next rhythmic/tone technique, look at the shadows of your surroundings. They will point to the next action. Activate this technique to alter the rhythm/tone.

To choose the next transitional gesture, look for other life, mobile or immobile, and witness how they move. They will teach you and you can use this technique to begin the cycle again.

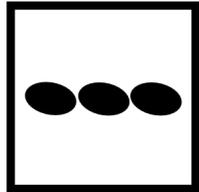
Continue for as long as you desire, then slowly turn down the volume of the amplifier.

Then turn it off.

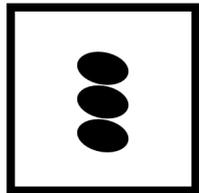
Pitch



Induce feedback, resolving and settling on a stable, constant tone

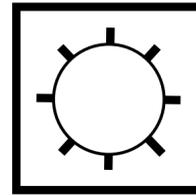


Pluck a 3-note unison

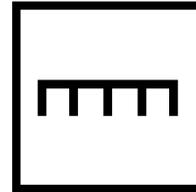


Pluck a 3-octave (same pitch class) chord

Rhythm/Tone



Use the volume knob to effect feedback oscillation. This may also affect pitch

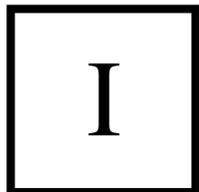


Rhythmically switch the toggle switch between all possible settings



Very slowly press or depress the wah pedal over the course of the prompt

Progression



Any starting pitch class

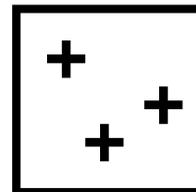


Any pitch class between I and V

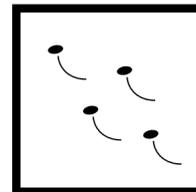


Any pitch approximately a 5th interval from the starting pitch class

Transition



Right-hand or left-hand hammer-on any 3 notes, one at a time, letting each sustain before tapping the next



Left-hand prepare pre-bend and pluck string while preparing another pre-bend to be played next



Right-hand slide 3 fingers along 3 strings (over the fret board) to produce harmonic glissandos

Teresa Baker

Mandan/Hidatsa; born 1985 in Watford City, ND

Knife River, 2024

Yarn, buckskin, artificial sinew, and willow on artificial turf

Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston. Acquired through the generosity of the Acquisitions Circle

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

— Teresa Baker

Teresa Baker's mixed-media objects draw together traditions of painting and tapestry, abstract collage, and landscape painting. By using collage, by lightly setting objects atop surfaces, Baker brings variation and depth to a monochrome plane of artificial turf. The title of this work references a place: the Knife River is a tributary of the Missouri River in North Dakota and a site of great significance for the Mandan and Hidatsa peoples, of whom Baker is descended. *Knife River* is an abstract arrangement of organic and inorganic materials, the juxtaposition of which charges ambiguities between location and place, and between object and memory. Diagonal cuts make formal shapes *and* resemble topography; a horizontal line is a rhythmic device that paces the eye *and* a horizon.

George Morrison's work does not depict a place — rather, it evokes place through form, color, and line. The line is a horizon, a motif he first adopted in the 1940s. For the artist, the horizon line is structural device, pictogram, and subject. Painting from his studio on the shore of Lake Superior, Morrison was indeed mesmerized by the horizon. “The basic thing in all the paintings is the horizon line,” he said, “which identifies each little work as a broad expanse of a segment of the earth.” The horizon in *Three Surrealist Forms, Automatic*, grounds and links the trio of jagged-edged shapes.

George Morrison

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

Structural Landscape with Moons, 1953

Tempera on paper

Collection of Bockley Gallery, Minneapolis

George Morrison first adopted a horizon line as a primary motif in the 1940s. For the artist, the horizon line is structural device, pictogram, and subject. Painting from his studio on the shore of Lake Superior, Morrison was mesmerized by the horizon: “The basic thing in all the paintings is the horizon line, which identifies each little work as a broad expanse of a segment of the earth.”

George Longfish

Seneca and Tuscarora; born 1942 in Ohsweken, Ontario

Take Two Aspirins and Call Me in the Morning, You Are on Target, 1984

Acrylic on canvas

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

When I look back and reflect on it, [modern art] just felt like home. It was where I belonged. At that time, around 1960, I probably wasn't even aware that there was Native American art. I always liked art, but I had a limited concept of it, so when modern art came along it opened up new doors to different things, and it was exciting.

—George Longfish

George Longfish's early paintings were characterized by a lexicon of shapes and color arranged across large canvases that drew inspiration from the spatial organization of Plains ledger drawings. Ribbon appliqué, mapping, and San Francisco Bay Area figuration and funk movements also figure here. The swirling row of scalloped shapes billows over the entire scene, looking as much like a tornado as the smoke trailing a swiftly moving cartoon character. Longfish described this cloud form, which recurs throughout his work of the 1980s, as a reference to "different levels of spiritual learning." His prescriptive title is ambiguous and funny, a reference to a classic joke about calling a doctor for an ailment you can cure on your own—and his way of crash landing a joke in the middle of a painting.

Sky Hopinka

Ho-Chunk Nation; born 1984 in Bellingham, WA

Left to right:

The outside being here right now, 2019

These are the moieties, 2019

This is a certain body, 2019

This is a stronghold, 2019

This is the changer, 2019

These are days longer than night, 2019

This is you describing what I saw, 2019

Inkjet prints and etchings

Edition of 3; 2 APs

Courtesy the artist and The Green Gallery, Milwaukee

Sky Hopinka uses the camera as tool not just for recording, but for seeing and thinking. In this series, he submitted his photographs to various processes that abstract the imagery he records. These photographs were printed on transparent film, cut up and arranged on the illuminated tray of an overhead projector. Hopinka then photographed the montages, printed the images at one-to-one scale, and etched words into the surface. This mode of abstracting in pursuit of new ways to picture landscape is analogous, for Hopinka, to “the way a landscape can interact not only with the histories that are present, but the gestures that we make to beckon those histories. How can I construct these landscapes myself, and in some way obfuscate them, and protect them, in order to resist the idea of colonization through documentation.”

George Morrison

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

Three Surrealist Forms, Automatic, 1984

Colored pencil, ink, and wash on paper

Private collection

A lot of my work emerged out of scribbles, part of the automatic drawing technique that came to us by way of the French, the Dadaists. They, in turn, were influenced by the associative thinking deriving from psychoanalysis Formalizing images that came out of scribbles, or masses of paint.

—George Morrison

Mary Sully

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

Beryl Markham, ca. late 1920s–early 1940s

Colored pencil, graphite, and watercolor on paper

Courtesy The Mary Sully Foundation

English-born aviator Beryl Markham (1902–86) was the first person to complete a nonstop solo flight from east to west across the Atlantic Ocean in 1936. Mary Sully symbolizes Markham's feat using multicolor-edged continents, an expansive ocean, and sinuous clouds that hover in the stratosphere. Identical but reversed silhouettes are linked by a blue line of travel. The middle panel distills these elements and colors into a patterned motif that suggests a recurring journey. In the bottom panel, Sully turns the curves and lines into a band of nested hexagons.

Caroline Monnet

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

The Flow Between Hard Places, 2019

Ductal concrete

Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Purchase, with funds by exchange from a gift of Mrs. Jules Loeb, donated by the Ontario Heritage Foundation

This is a monument to people and language, water and time. To create it, Caroline Monnet recorded Rose Wawatie-Beaudoin (an Anishinaabe elder from Kitigan Zibi, Quebec, the homelands of Monnet's mother) saying the word "pasapkedjinawong" in Anishinaabemowin language, which translates to "the river that passes between the rocks." The recording was converted to a sound wave, to which Monnet added sounds of water and ambient noise. These were modeled as a three-dimensional shape then cast in ductal concrete, a lightweight and sustainable construction material. The material literally and metaphorically concretizes sound: the undulating edges result from looping the sound wave.

Monnet explains that this sculpture "celebrates the efforts of Anishinaabe Chief Pakinawatik from Kitigan Zibi to request from the Office of the Governor General that parts of their traditional territory be returned. Around 1850, he and others traveled over 350 miles of waterways from Kitigan Zibi to Toronto to petition the government. Their labors were successful but bittersweet: land was granted on the condition that the people remain on their land, confined and sedentary."

Section 3

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.

—Kay WalkingStick

The artworks in this gallery, beginning with Kay WalkingStick's monumental series from the 1970s, explore abstraction's capacity to convey expansive concepts through minimal means. Artistic choices tend toward reduction of color and motif, and on the repetition of identical or similar elements. Hand-scaled, handmade elements are massed in serial arrangements in order to assert space and to show the ways an idea or object, repeated, accumulates meaning and visual impact. Arranged in rows, individual elements begin to take on the shape of time—the time required of making and of viewing. Shapes become patterns and cohere as a kind of lexicon, like an idea diagrammed on the wall or a story to be read. Parts are inextricable from the whole, an association we interpret as the expression of individuality within community, and of material considerations within structures of cultural knowledge.

Dakota Mace

Diné; born 1991 in Albuquerque, NM

Left to right:

So' II (Stars II), 2022

Chemigram

Courtesy the artist and Bruce Silverstein Gallery, New York

Béésh Łigaii (Silver I), 2022

Chemigram

Collection of Pamela and Kevin Wolf

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 kind of being one collective experience.

—Dakota Mace

Dakota Mace uses photography, textiles, and printmaking to engage with Diné history and cosmology. Here, the artist creates an arrangement of forty chemigrams, a photographic technique wherein chemicals are applied to light-sensitive paper. Mace says that she was drawn to chemigrams “because of the spontaneity of the process itself ... allowing the material to control how the image is created.” The prints range from murky and black to brilliant and grainy, punctuated by white specks that recall a galaxy or nebula. *So' II (Stars II)*, from the Diné word for stars, pictures four sacred shapes through which Mace connects to her ancestral homeland: Na'ashjé'íí Asdzáá (Spider Woman), Dził (Mountain), Tsił nó'ólí' (Whirling Log), and Djíí' (Four). Whirling Log, for example, is an auspicious, branching symbol evocative of a Buddhist *manji* or Hindu *swastika*, that represents the four sacred mountains that surround the Diné nation. *Béésh Łigaii* means silver, and Mace uses four abstract designs that have been passed down through the generations of her family's silversmiths. In both works, the repetition of like shapes contrasts with the unique qualities of each chemigram.

Kimowan Metchewais

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

Luther (Striped Man), 2003

Photo paper, watercolor, graphite, and adhesive tape on paper

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

Kimowan Metchewais made collages with his own extensive and meticulously cataloged archive of Polaroids. He transferred the Polaroids to papers soaked in rust- and tobacco-saturated water (a “ritual baptism,” as he called it), and then pieced the papers together with adhesive tape. The provisional nature of the work allowed him to continually modify his artworks.

“It is patched together without much regard for artistic aesthetic,” he wrote in 2009. “The parts create a whole.” *Luther (Striped Man)* was once documented as a larger work titled *Robe Language* after a favorite book, *The Language of the Robe: American Indian Trade Blankets* (1992). Metchewais’s Polaroid images are of himself and his brother, Luther, covered by a black-and-white striped textile. Though the body is obscured and abstracted, Metchewais invited stereotypical interpretations of images of Native American people in order to satirize, among other pokes, the uses of photography to classify and obtain.

Metchewais died in 2011, age forty-seven, after a lengthy illness. He donated his art and archives to the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Washington, DC. ICA/Boston collaborated with NMAI to conserve and present these delicate works, most of which have never before been exhibited.

Kay WalkingStick

Cherokee and Anglo; born 1935 in Syracuse, NY

Chief Joseph Series, 1974–76

Acrylic, beeswax, and varnish on canvas

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

I was trying to show that very simple minimalist paintings can convey an idea, convey energy, and . . . convey this story. And when you walk past it, I want you to feel that [it's] like a dirge You have to look at each one of them, so it becomes a trail of your own.

—Kay WalkingStick

As Kay WalkingStick began to develop her artistic sensibility in the mid 1970s, the flowering of feminist and civil rights movements, especially the American Indian Movement, informed the content of her painting. “It was always important to be recognized as a Native person . . . [and] to be understood as a New York artist, one who was working in the mainstream.” WalkingStick aligned her work with such fellow painters as Ad Reinhardt, Mark Rothko, Brice Marden, and Jasper Johns.

In 1974, WalkingStick began a suite of thirty-six paintings (twenty-seven of which are on view here) to honor Nez Perce hero Chief Joseph and his people. Their 1300-mile attempt to cross north to Canada, in search of freedom, was defeated by U.S. military forces in 1877. WalkingStick forgoes depiction for affective surface, subdued hues, and the generation of a community of like forms. Each panel includes a bisected sphere replicated in two sizes, and these four shapes are repeated in rhythmic permutations. Over an ink-stained canvas, the artist plotted the shapes within a frame, then layered the surface with a mixture of saponified wax and acrylic paint to make thick, object-like paintings.

Sonya Kelliher-Combs

Iñupiaq and Koyukon Athabascan; born 1969 in Bethel, AK

Salmon Curl, 2023

Acrylic polymer, reindeer hair, acid-free mylar, nylon thread, and steel pins

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

Courtesy the artist and Tureen, Dallas

Sonya Kelliher-Combs makes paintings and sculptures that combine synthetic, organic, and traditional materials such as acrylic polymer and animal parts as a means to pursue what she calls “hybrid materiality.” Her heritage and her residence in Alaska cohere the subjects and materials with which she engages: family and community histories, vernacular traditions, organic materials, self-definition, place, and time. She has explained that the “intimacy of customary women’s work informs my work” and this manifests, for example, as repeated forms and textured surfaces, and through the labor that making requires. This presentation combines *Salmon Curl* and *Salmon Curl II*, 120 individual sculptures composed of acrylic polymer, quill, animal hair, and mylar. The title alludes to the artist’s seasonal salmon harvest—the tapered curl resembles cold-drying sockeye salmon, as well Iñupiaq parka sleeve patterns, a shape Kelliher-Combs consistently uses in her sculptures.

Caroline Monnet

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

When Will They See Us, 2019

Synthetic flashspun high-density polyethylene on fabric

Collection of Caitlin Rose and Michel Boislard

Caroline Monnet's work is grounded in her university sociology studies as well as her childhood with parents who renovated houses. "I was always living in a construction site," she explains. This is, in part, the source of her affinity for and use of manufactured materials. In *When Will They See Us*, identical strips of black, air-barrier membrane are stitched in rows to make an object of imposing size. The pliable textile is typically used to control the flow of air between a building's exterior and interior, but through process, Monnet dislocates its conventional application and its associations, and reconstructs it as an ode to community and visibility. The color and facture resemble, for her, crow feathers and charred wood and allude to histories of the monochrome as advanced by twentieth century artists such as Louise Nevelson, Ad Reinhardt, and Kazimir Malevich. "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."

George Morrison

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

Left to right:

Untitled, 1973

Ink on paper

Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Purchased with matching
grant from the Museum Purchase Plan and the National
Endowment for the Arts, 1973

Untitled (Provincetown, Grand Portage), 1959–99

Ink on paper

Collection of Bockley Gallery, Minneapolis

I also sometimes let go of space entirely. In these paintings there is no reference to a horizon line or anything; it's open space. That was typical of what some of the painters in New York called endless space . . . The painting seems as if it could go on and on in all directions.

—George Morrison

These two works show George Morrison's commitment to mark-making and "endless space." Particularly remarkable is the drawing dated 1959–1999. Morrison made thousands of pen marks on a single sheet of paper over the course of forty years, beginning in Provincetown, where he often spent summers, and ending in Grand Portage, the location of his last studio. One can imagine the artist adding marks over the years in devotion to the integrity of the individual mark and its function as one part of an accumulating whole.

Section 4

The musical parameter that is most important to me is counterpoint....
I am speaking about the contrary motion of navigating a world that assumes
where you are going because of where you came from.

—Raven Chacon

Counterpoint is a composition of two or more musical lines (or voices) that are both harmonically interdependent, and distinct in melody and rhythm. Think of counterpoint as both contrast and alignment, similarity and difference. The theory of counterpoint conducts an exchange among the works in this gallery and the two adjacent rooms. Sound is made and alluded to. Some titles reference stories, prayers, and song, evoking the sounds these modes of communication require. Other works portray composers, compositions, and sound patterns. Across these galleries, sound is an abstraction that flows through shape, line, and pattern.

Caroline Monnet

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

Kikinaham—To Sing Along With 01 & 02, 2023

Weaving, roof underlay, and waterproofing membrane

Collection of John Cook

Temporality, movement, knowledge transmission, and how meaning is conveyed through sound are all critical concepts in Caroline Monnet's work. In this piece, she adapts traditional basketry technique to pink roof underlay and black waterproofing membrane, which bear the manufacturer's logos. The interlace of color resembles data, like a digitally translated song. The weaving trails into fringe, unfinished, ongoing. Monnet describes these works as lessons for "living together in cities, all connected and part of a complex weaving; we have to sing along with one another, to recognize that we are vibrations of an ecosystem."

Mary Sully

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

Ernest Schelling, ca. late 1920s–early 1940s

Colored pencil, graphite, and watercolor on paper

Courtesy The Mary Sully Foundation

Ernest Henry Schelling (1876–1939) was an American pianist, composer, and conductor. A child prodigy, he began his concert pianist career at just four years old. In 1924, Schelling became the first conductor of the Young People's Concerts of the New York Philharmonic. Mary Sully pictures him with stylized florals, and musical notes on a staff in a shape that mimics a proscenium stage. The art nouveau florals throughout may reference bestowing performers with flowers. The middle panel refracts the flowers and lines, adding a palette of pinks, oranges, and aquas, into an intricate all-over pattern that Sully distills and enlarges for the bottom panel to generate strips of florals and interlocking blocks.

Raven Chacon

Diné; born 1977 at Fort Defiance, Navajo Nation

American Ledger No. 1, 2018/2020

Screenprint on wool and synthetic blanket

Collection of the artist

American Ledger No. 1 is a narrative score that uses the design of a United States flag — its stars and stripes swapped with a graphic notation to be performed. Raven Chacon describes the score: “In chronological descending order, moments of contact, enactment of laws, events of violence, the building of cities, and erasure of land and worldview are mediated through graphic notation, and realized by sustaining and percussive instruments, coins, axe and wood, a police whistle, and a match. The score is to be displayed as a flag, a wall, a blanket, a billboard, or a door.”

Chacon used this *American Ledger No. 1* blanket for the sound installation in the John Hancock Founders Gallery on this floor.

For many players with sustaining and percussive instruments,
coins, axe and wood, a police whistle, and a match.

For at least 13 minutes

For any number of musicians with any number of non-musicians

Each line is a minute or longer

Line 1 is for both percussive and bendable tones

Line 2 begins with a warbly long tone crossfading into waves
of harmonic or dynamic increases. X = chop wood

Line 3 is for police whistle(s). Other instruments may join

Line 4 is for coins to be thrown. Two instruments may
accompany.

Line 5 is a line

Line 6 is a grand decelerando ending with the striking of a match

Line 7 is for acknowledging groupings of 5's and 4's. Chop
wood. End with everyone and everything.

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

From left:

Cree Prayer Series #1, 1978

Cree Prayer Series #2, 1978

Cree Prayer Series #3, 1978

Acrylic and pastel on paper

Cree Prayer Series #4, 1978

Cree Prayer Series #5, 1978

Acrylic, pastel, and collage on paper

Courtesy the Estate of Jaune-Quick-to-See Smith and
Garth Greenan Gallery, New York

Jaune Quick-to-See Smith described her works from this early period as “inhabited landscapes,” and they are characterized by abstract symbols and shapes rendered in browns, golds, and deep reds. The repetition of motifs is central to the symbolic vocabulary that she would continue throughout her career. In 1982, she said of her work: “[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.”

Mary Sully

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

Bishop Hare, ca. late 1920s–early 1940s

Colored pencil, graphite, and watercolor on paper

Courtesy The Mary Sully Foundation

William Hobart Hare (1838–1909) was an Episcopal bishop known for his missionary work among Native American tribes in Nebraska and South Dakota. Hare led an effort by the church to convert and train Native clergy, including Mary Sully's father Tipi Sapa/Philip Deloria. The black cross shape looks like a robed figure and the silhouette of a bird, a possible allusion to Hare's given name, Swift Bird. In the middle panel, Sully draws a black cross with arms of uniform length, a Christian symbol subsumed into a distillation of cross, tipi, and line. The color of the mountains flow into riverine lines that segment the composition into diamonds, which in the bottom panel, Sully draws as motif of cross-squares adorned with three-forked lines that echo tipi tops.

Teresa Baker

Mandan/Hidatsa; born 1985 in Watford City, ND

Winter Stories, 2022

Spray paint, yarn, and buckskin on artificial turf

Collection of Teresa Baker and Michael Mason

Audie Murray

Cree and Métis; born 1993 in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Bear Smudge, 2021

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

Courtesy the artist and Fazakas Gallery, Vancouver, British Columbia

Bear Smudge documents a ceremony at dusk. A woman (the artist) smears bear grease (a traditional form of rendered bear fat) on the camera lens, which blurs the view into a field of blues and greens. While we can no longer discern detail, we hear the faint sounds of matchlight and wind. In this work, Murray uses abstraction as a tool of transformation and protection, obscuring her performance as a kind of reversal of the ways Indigenous communities have been documented by ethnographers and anthropologists.

Remnants of Transference is a recording of the artist's performance in *Bear Smudge*. By using such objects as bear grease and sage, the artist privileges the culturally specific properties of her mediums. Murray treated the cotton cloth with light-sensitive chemicals which record objects and actions on its surface when exposed to light. Referencing the photographic and using it to capture the performance subverts conventional uses of photography — specifically those historically inflicted upon Indigenous people — to record. Documenting the ephemeral on Murray's own terms is an extraordinary assertion of control over one's visual apprehension.

Sky Hopinka

Ho-Chunk Nation; born 1984 in Bellingham, WA

Mnemonics of Shape and Reason, 2021

HD video (color, sound; 4:13 minutes)

Courtesy the artist and Broadway Gallery, New York

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.

—Sky Hopinka

Section 5

I want to represent this image as a cultural document laden with specific, but not so obvious, meanings. I call these hidden meanings “live relics.” They are relics because they are like trace elements from memory, history, and culture. They are alive because they continue to transmit influence to this day. It is not easy to see live relics because they seem to exist outside the scope of awareness, especially those live relics that refer to culture.

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.

—Kimowan Metchewais

The works in this gallery persist as live relics. Using a range of formal techniques and media, artists shape one thing/idea/image into another — a photo into a textile, a moth into paper, yarn into a river. Labored surfaces obscure shapes and images, scale equalizes object and space, and a reduced palette is used to compress space and obscure subjectivity. We see live-ness as a mechanism collapsing distinctions among concept and material, figure and ground, narrative and abstraction.

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

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

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.

—George Longfish

George Longfish combines multiple approaches and styles in this painting. Gestural, loose brushstrokes intersect with monochromatic, rectilinear shapes. He also collages readymade objects onto the canvas—channeling the postmodern approaches of artists such as Jaune Quick-to-See Smith and Robert Rauschenberg, who sought to disrupt the so-called *purity* of modernism. Longfish affixed three rows of elks' teeth, which are a traditional symbol of paternal pride, referenced in the work's title, and described the painting as an allusion to his concern for Native communities moving into broader world.

Kimowan Metchewais

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

Five Moths, 2000

Pigments, paint, and adhesive tape on paper

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

Kimowan Metchewais described himself as “a sculptor of flat, rectangular objects of various textures and tone,” and called his largest works “paper walls”: two-sided objects suspended from the ceiling. His large works were intended to be folded to a portable size, mimicking the folded construction of some Plains parfleches (utilitarian containers made from rawhide). The folds add dimension to flat paper and differentiation to a monochromatic field. *Five Moths* — in saturated red, one of the artist’s signature colors — may have once been incorporated into a larger paper wall. It is part of a suite of works that feature moths, of which the artist professed a fascination stemming from the insect’s intrinsic delicacy and its appearances in prophecy. He considered the night-dwelling winged insects to be a butterfly’s opposite and a symbol of mortality.

Kimowan Metchewais

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

Chief's Blanket, 2002

Photo paper, ink, pigment, watercolor, and colored pencil on paper

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

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 love the time where day meets night. And out of chance, I am neither white nor red.

—Kimowan Metchewais

Kimowan Metchewais was an astute critic and writer about his own work and directed his quick wit and predilection for satire at insincerity and conditioned thinking. Here, the words written on the photocollage point with humor at the imperceptible differences between an exalted first-phase Chief's blanket and a landscape photo design.

A note on the inscription: Formerly known as Kimowan McLain (his stepfather's surname), Metchewais adopted his mother's name in the latter part of his life.

Teresa Baker

Mandan/Hidatsa; born 1985 in Watford City, ND

Of This Time, 2024

Acrylic, yarn, and cottonwood on artificial turf

Collection of Charlotte and Herbert S. Wagner III

George Morrison

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

Untitled, 1965

Oil on canvas

Gochman Family Collection

Simultaneous with his multicolor abstractions, George Morrison made a series called *White Paintings* for which he layered white over colors and then demarcated the scumbled, thick surface with incised lines. He adapted the motif of line (and outline) and shape from his practice of automatic drawing and assemblage driftwood reliefs. Formally, the sectioning or patchwork — a whole made of parts — is akin to those of his fellow artists, such as Philip Guston and Louise Nevelson.

Kay WalkingStick

Cherokee and Anglo; born 1935 in Syracuse, NY

Archetypal Image, 1975

Acrylic and ink on canvas

Courtesy the artist and Hales, London and New York

Motivated by stain painters such as Helen Frankenthaler and Sam Gilliam, Kay WalkingStick juxtaposes the liveliness of fluid ink washes with acrylic paint. The warped rectangle, like a tightly pulled cloth, is tethered to red grid lines. Between canvas edge and bowed rectangle is an arc shape, a recurring element WalkingStick described “like the shape between bodies” and the motion of a hand or arm across a surface. The grid and geometric shapes are characteristic of the minimalist vocabularies she explored during the mid 1970s.

Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill

Cree and Métis; born 1979 in Comox, British Columbia

M**, 2023**

Stacking chairs, T-shirts, sneakers, 16mm film, and projectors

Courtesy the artist and Unit 17, Vancouver, British Columbia

What you see: stacked chairs outfitted with T-shirts and sneakers, two looping film projectors screening two films, one of streaming lines, the other flickering pinkish-brown orbs. The lines are hair, those of the artist and family members; the orbs are singed in silk tissue collaged to the 16mm clear film leader. The clothing was worn by Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill and her mother, and here it dresses the stacked chairs as if they're bodies, cradling devices for information sharing. The title, *M*****, is a word annulled by asterisks, censored, but also a gap to be completed by the viewer. Hill thinks about the legacies of film and photography as colonialist tools of documentation and extraction. This is a work about legacies, about hand-me-downs and handed down, about handwork and repetition. It is about labor, as in the reproductive labor of motherhood, the labor of time for community (stacked chairs may remind us of community gatherings), and the hours required to make art.

Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill

Cree and Métis; born 1979 in Comox, British Columbia

Site Parasite Dice Paradise, 2023

Disassembled umbrellas, paper cutouts, strawberries, spider cocoon, wire, tape, and thread

Courtesy the artist and Unit 17, Vancouver, British Columbia

Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill makes these sculptures from aluminum umbrella frames, each of eight arms sprouting dozens of eight-armed bent wire modules, a sculpture reproducing itself. Their "umbrellanness" gives way to anthropomorphizing. Cutout images of insects, eggs, and the birth of Hill's child dangle alongside cellophane-wrapped objects and fresh strawberries. "I wanted to place fear, revulsion, love, the body, life and rot, all together," Hill says. Indeed, complexity is relayed with the barest of means. This is a field within which to abstract, but the titled works reference the parasitical phase of species reproduction, of motherhood, as well as society's contradictory views of it.

Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill

Cree and Métis; born 1979 in Comox, British Columbia

Clockwise from right:

Out of Time, 2023

Blackberry ink, pencil, hair, and glue on silk tissue

Collection of John Cook

Project, 2024

Blackberry ink, burn marks, and glue on silk tissue paper

Echo Body, 2023

Blackberry ink, pencil, burn marks, and 16mm splicing tape on silk tissue

Collection of John Cook

Fade-out, 2023

Blackberry ink, pencil, photocopied paper cutouts, stickers, and glue on silk tissue

Curtains, 2023

Blackberry ink, pencil, photocopied paper cutouts, burn marks, and glue on silk tissue

Shadow, 2024

Blackberry ink, hair ash, paper cutouts, burn marks, dried strawberry, thread, and glue on silk tissue paper

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

Section 6

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.

—Jaune Quick-to-See Smith

Artists think through, and with, materials. In this gallery, we see artists coaxing materials into concepts, and translating concepts into objects using processes that draw from personal and cultural knowledge. We call this “material thinking,” a convergence of idea and medium that courses through abstraction. What do the materials do and what do they signify? If materials are transmitters, then the juxtaposition of materials (for example, organic and inorganic), multiplies the transmission. Both found and sourced materials arrive preloaded with meaning and association, which artists exploit and bend to their will: photographs, artificial turf, hair, umbrellas, seedpods, canvas, paint, plaster body casts, and IKEA tabletops engender associations that align in an artist's attentiveness to material thinking as an engine of abstraction.

Kay WalkingStick

Cherokee and Anglo; born 1935 in Syracuse, NY

Apron Agitato, 1974

Acrylic on canvas

Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Gift of Laura Delaney Taft and John Taft, 2024

Inspired in part by Sam Gilliam's Drape paintings, Kay WalkingStick made a series of works of her painting apron. We see in *Apron Agitato* the elevation of an apron—like those worn by cooks, painters, and domestic laborers, among others—to the status of icon. The marks accumulate into a portrait of labor and time. WalkingStick pins the ties to the points of a triangle, lovingly renders the folds, and obliterates its shape with colorful, agitated marks. *Agitato* (in English, “to move”) is a musical directive to indicate a hurried, active rhythm and for the artist characterized the flurry of hand marks. The arcs created by the apron edges informed her other works of this period, also on view in this exhibition.

Sonya Kelliher-Combs

Iñupiaq and Koyukon Athabascan; born 1969 in Bethel, AK

Pink Slips 2, 2023

Acrylic polymer, cotton muslin, steel pin, and paper

Courtesy the artist and Tureen, Dallas

Sonya Kelliher-Combs

Iñupiaq and Koyukon Athabascan; born 1969 in Bethel, AK

Red Large Beaded Secrets, 2023

Acrylic polymer, glass bead, nylon thread, cotton muslin,
and paper

Courtesy the artist and Tureen, Dallas

[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.

—Sonya Kelliher-Combs

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

Courtesy the artist

If you laughed when you read the title above, then you know something about the Boston Tea Party. Anna Tsouhlarakis's title pokes at this foundational American event, one whose legacy is a fable of taxation and revolution. When the artist began to conceptualize this new sculpture last year, tariffs dominated the news cycle (and still do). The conflation of Boston history with current events—of past and present—aligns with the ways Tsouhlarakis mixes sourced and found materials, for example IKEA shelves, artificial sinew, aspen logs, tobacco lids, and press-on nails. She describes her approach to concept and medium as “Indigenizing,” a word that embodies her desire to make art that solves for a web of influence that includes Sol LeWitt's white cubes, Navajo binding customs, and “whatever-is-at-hand” building on the reservation. As she has explained, “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.” Here she accumulates materials, objects, and ideas into a structure that resembles ship's bow and a fortress—a protected site for a process of Indigenization.

Teresa Baker

Mandan/Hidatsa; born 1985 in Watford City, ND

Throw It to the Ocean, 2025

Acrylic, yarn, Monterey cypress seed pods, willow, and artificial sinew on artificial turf

Private collection, Los Angeles

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

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

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

Right:

Ronan Robe #1, 1977

Oil, beeswax, charcoal, and soot on canvas with lodgepole

Collection of Timothy C. Headington

Left:

Ronan Robe #2, 1977

Oil, beeswax, charcoal, and soot on canvas with lodgepole

Yellowstone Art Museum, Billings, MT

I went to the trading post and bought an old buffalo hide that had moth holes that gave me inspiration. Also when I arrived at UNM [University of New Mexico], Harmony Hammond was artist in residence and she... encouraged us to get off the canvas and try some other things. So that encouraged me to make the Ronan paintings. It became a very elaborate process because I was trying to re-create those hides. I had the idea to melt beeswax and paint that on the hides, and then paint the designs on them. For the early ones, I would run them through the washing machine over and over until they became frayed at the edges.

—Jaune Quick-to-See Smith

Ronan Robe is a series of paintings that share the name of a town on the reservation of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Nation (in present day Montana). Treating canvas as one would hide, smoking it and working its surface, references both the traditions of Smith's relatives and abstract painting. The artist's early works of the 1970s and '80s are characterized by a personal lexicon of marks and color: lines short and long, circles and squares, and X's. The leaning tipi lodgepole adds material history and nods to the minimalist sculpture of the time.

Mary Sully

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

Annie Stein, ca. late 1920s–early 1940s

Colored pencil and graphite on paper

Courtesy The Mary Sully Foundation

Annie Stein (1879–1947) is the only visual artist portrayed in the “personality prints” series and her inclusion, especially given Stein’s low profile compared to the other subjects, suggests that Stein and Mary Sully may have been personally acquainted. Little is known about Stein except that she was a New York-based painter and exhibited in galleries throughout the 1930s. Sully’s portrait of Stein is exceedingly abstract, with no decipherable markers of her personality, allowing us only conjecture stemming from scant facts: perhaps the undulating streamers of blue and peach reference the Hudson River, a recurring subject in Stein’s watercolor paintings.

This portrait in particular brings to mind the caricatured personality distillations so popular among early twentieth century modern artists.

Mary Sully

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

Nila Cram Cook, ca. late 1920s–early 1940s

Colored pencil, graphite, and watercolor on paper

Courtesy The Mary Sully Foundation

Nila (or Nilla) Cram Cook (1908–82) was a scholar, linguist, and author best known for being the first American to join Mohandas K. Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram, a model community, during the movement for Indian independence that grew in prominence during the 1920s and '30s. Her arrival to and eventual deportation from India were heavily publicized in Western news media. Given the subject, the top panel might be the prow of a ship or a symbolic path to enlightenment. In the middle panel, art deco pennants pattern over repeating boxes. The bottom panel most resembles the beadwork and quillwork of Plains artists, specifically the motif of the so-called windows to the soul.

Mary Sully

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

Amelia Earhart, ca. late 1920s–early 1940s

Colored pencil, graphite, and watercolor on paper

Courtesy The Mary Sully Foundation

In 1932, aviator Amelia Earhart (1897–1937) was the first woman to complete a nonstop solo crossing of the Atlantic Ocean. Mary Sully draws Earhart's single-engine propeller encircled by cheering silhouettes — perhaps an emulation of the pilot's view from the cockpit — within a stylized compass rose. The middle panel gestures to spotlights, highlighting Earhart's celebrity, while in the bottom panel, Sully's diamond pattern resembles those on parfleche painting (utilitarian rawhide containers) made by Plains women.

Founders

FOUNDERS

Raven Chacon

Diné; born 1977 at Fort Defiance, Navajo Nation

Controlled Burn, 2025

Ten-channel site-specific sound installation

Courtesy the artist

During a visit to the ICA in preparation for this commissioned sound installation, Raven Chacon noted the large U.S. flag posted to the northeast. From this particular vantage, the flag is visible but silenced by ICA's glass facade. *Controlled Burn* returns sound to this flag by means of "sonification," the transmission of information via sound. Here, the audio is mixed from Chacon's recording of a bonfire fanned into flame by a flag and a blanket. (The blanket is on view in *An Indigenous Present. American Ledger No. 1* is a score originally composed in 2018.) A flag is a symbol; its emblematic, visual properties overshadow its sonic qualities. *Controlled Burn* traffics in transmission and reversal, for example between sight and sound, image and representation, place and displacement.

It may be of interest to note that in the view beyond the U.S. flag lie two markers of the American Revolutionary War: the white steeple of Old North Church, a stop on Paul Revere's midnight ride, and the Bunker Hill Monument.

Raven Chacon

Diné; born 1977 at Fort Defiance, Navajo Nation

Controlled Burn, 2025

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Every exhibition is the result of collaborative work. In the process of organizing exhibitions, the ICA Curatorial Department engages in multiple conversations with artists, educators, and professionals within and outside the museum and across every department. We thank these many individuals for their guidance, generosity, and partnership. We extend our deepest thanks to the artists.

The following installed and helped realize this exhibition:

Jon Doucette
Kelly Golf
Andi Gray
Laura Hildebrand
R J La Mura
Shane Murray
Scott Oglesby
Kali Orna
John Quackenbush
Megan Remington
Samantha Rodgers
Sam Rosenfeld
Bella Steele
Gaby Schaab
Nate Williams

Daniel Abugattas, Production Manager for
Performing Arts — Audio
Liv Biel, Exhibitions Manager
Emma Blades, Associate Registrar
Inês Costa Dias, Contract Registrar
Charlie Crowell, Preparator
Daniel Lemire, Registration and Preparation
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Melissa Lotery, Director of Exhibitions
Janet Moore, Senior Registrar
Tim Obetz, Chief Preparator
Angela Torchio, Principal Designer