

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Artsy
11 Influential Native American Artists
Sandra Hale Schulman
9 November 2021



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Over the past few years, Native Americans have become increasingly visible within the cultural mainstream in the United States. From the appointment of high-ranking government officials like Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, to the centring of Indigenous stewardship in the fight for climate resilience, to the popularity of hit television shows and podcasts like *Reservation Dogs* and *The Red Nation*—at long last, Native voices are finally being heard on their own terms.

The same is true within the art world. With major museum exhibitions, gallery shows, institutional leadership, sold-out art fair booths, and new Native-led arts initiatives like *Forge Project* and *Ma's House*, we are currently seeing a wave of recognition for contemporary Native American artists.

From art world veterans who have been using their work to advocate for Native rights for decades to a younger generation of artists who are using traditional techniques to address contemporary issues, here is a list of some of the most influential Native American artists living and working today.

Jeffrey Gibson – B.1972, Colorado. Lives and works in Hudson, New York.



Image: Jeffrey Gibson, BEYOND THE HORIZON, 2021. Sikkema Jenkins & Co.



Image: Jeffrey Gibson, Sentinel, 2020. Roberts Projects

Through his paintings and sculptures, Choctaw/Cherokee artist Jeffrey Gibson employs traditional Indigenous handcraft techniques like river cane basket weaving, intricate glass beading, Algonquian birch bark biting, and porcupine quill work. These methods are used to create dazzling objects like beaded punching bags, signage that reads like woven blankets, and 12-foot-tall fringe curtains that tell stories through colour.

His work is currently on view at the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum outside of Boston, in a solo show titled "Infinite Indigenous Queer Love." A celebration of Gibson's identity as a queer Indigenous man, the exhibition includes a new series of collages, three fringe sculptures, and a number of collaborative video pieces.

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Image: Jeffrey Gibson, CAN YOU FEEL IT?, 2013. Kavi Gupta.



Image: Jeffrey Gibson, Speak To Me So That I Can Understand, 2018. Stephen Friedman Gallery.

In 2019, Gibson received the MacArthur “Genius Grant” and created a massive pyramid-shaped sculpture in New York’s Socrates Sculpture Park. The multilevel, brightly patterned work *Because Once You Enter My House It Becomes Our House* (2020) is an homage to the underrecognized ingenuity of Indigenous North American peoples and cultures. Made of plywood with a steel infrastructure, the work is covered in wheat-pasted posters that integrate geometric designs with slogans like “Respect Indigenous Land” and “The Future is Present.”

Born in Colorado, Gibson’s family moved frequently, which helped influence his cross-cultural aesthetic. His work has been featured in multiple solo and group exhibitions, including the 2019 Whitney Biennial.