

# MANY WESTS

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## ARTISTS SHAPE AN AMERICAN IDEA

Commonly accepted ideas about the American West are often based on a past that never was. They frequently diminish, if not overlook entirely, important viewpoints and experiences. For some, “the West” can conjure images of rugged colonial settlers, gun-toting cowboys, or scenic expanses of vacant land. These stereotypical associations took hold in the eighteenth century, as the U.S. government aggressively expanded westward across the continent. Over this period, the United States fought and displaced Indigenous people, stripped the region of its natural resources, and seized lands through treaties and wars.

*Many Wests: Artists Shape an American Idea* offers counterviews of “the West” through the perspectives of forty-eight modern and contemporary artists, especially those who identify as Black, Indigenous, Asian American, Latinx, and LGBTQ+. Their artworks question old and racist clichés, examine tragic and sidelined histories, and illuminate the multiple communities and events that contribute to the past and present of this region. The exhibition’s three sections—Caretakers, Memory Makers, and Boundary Breakers—highlight the various ways artists challenge mythic conceptions of the American West, often demonstrating the resilience of marginalized communities. They reveal that “the West” has always been a place of many stories, experiences, and cultures.

This exhibition is the culmination of a multi-year Art Bridges Initiative organized by the Smithsonian American Art Museum that aims to expand access to and experiences of American art. Since 2019, SAAM has partnered with four Western-region museums—the Boise Art Museum (Boise, Idaho), the Utah Museum of Fine Arts (Salt Lake City, Utah), the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art (Eugene, Oregon), and the Whatcom Museum (Bellingham, Washington). *Many Wests* brings together artworks from the permanent collections of all five museums and shows how art can help us reflect on history, examine the present, and envision a more inclusive future.

*Many Wests* was organized by:

Amy Chaloupka, Curator of Art, Whatcom Museum

Melanie Fales, Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer, Boise Art Museum

Anne Hyland, Art Bridges Initiative Curatorial Coordinator, Smithsonian American Art Museum

Danielle Knapp, McCosh Curator, Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, University of Oregon

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E. Carmen Ramos, former Acting Chief Curator, Curator of Latinx Art, and Art Bridges Initiative Project Director, Smithsonian American Art Museum

Whitney Tassie, Senior Curator and Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, Utah Museum of Fine Arts

This is one in a series of American art exhibitions created through a multi-year, multi-institutional partnership formed by the Smithsonian American Art Museum as part of the Art Bridges Initiative.



The subject of this exhibition makes us especially cognizant of the Indigenous people who are the original stewards and protectors of this continent. The Boise Art Museum, the Jordan Schnitzer Museum, the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Utah Museum of Fine Arts, and the Whatcom Museum collectively acknowledge and honor the tribal communities upon whose homelands our institutions reside today.

Doeg  
Goshute Tribe  
Kalapuya Tribe  
Lhaq'temish—Lummi People  
Nuxwsá7aq—Nooksack People  
Nacotchtank  
Paiute Tribe  
Piscataway  
Shoshone Tribe  
Shoshone-Bannock Tribe  
Shoshone-Paiute Tribe  
Ute Tribe

### **Caretakers**

Through their work, artists can redefine what it means to take care of themselves, their communities, and their futures. The artistic choices they make are often influenced by commitments to the stewardship of land, history, language, and culture. Artists have tremendous power as the custodians of their own truths. They draw upon their personal narratives, communal ties, and collective experiences in the American West to honor the past and shape legacies for

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generations to come. Works made in response to urgent political, social, or environmental needs are often calls to action. For many, the act of creation is personally therapeutic and life-affirming. As caretakers, artists bridge past and present and work toward better futures.

**Awa Tsireh**, also known as **Alfonso Roybal**

San Ildefonso Pueblo

born 1898, San Ildefonso Pueblo, NM; died ca. 1955, San Ildefonso Pueblo, NM

***Dog Dancers***

ca. 1917–25

watercolor and pencil on paperboard

***Hunting Priest and Mountain Sheep Dancers***

ca. 1917–20

watercolor and pencil on paperboard

***Buffalo Mother, Buffalo Dance***

ca. 1930–40

watercolor and ink on paper

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Corbin-Henderson Collection, Gift of Alice H. Rossin, 1979.144.8, 1979.144.36, and 1979.144.26

Awa Tsireh created stunning works depicting the daily and ceremonial life of Pueblo communities in the Southwest. During his life, the U.S. government, under an assimilationist mandate, attempted to stamp out ritual Pueblo practices even as white anthropologists and patrons, believing in preservationist ideas, supported his work and, in a sense, defended the value of Native culture. Awa Tsireh's work emerged out of his careful negotiation of these forces and his efforts to resist cultural oppression and protect Pueblo sacred knowledge. Rather than paint scenes of rituals meant only for the initiated, Awa Tsireh chose to portray aspects of public ceremonies that were acceptable for outsider eyes.

**Awa Tsireh**, also known as **Alfonso Roybal**

San Ildefonso Pueblo

born 1898, San Ildefonso Pueblo, NM; died ca. 1955, San Ildefonso Pueblo, NM

***Basket Dancers***

ca. 1930–40

ink and colored ink on paperboard

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Corbin-Henderson Collection, Gift of Alice H. Rossin, 1979.144.41

For decades, scholars attributed Awa Tsireh's use of blank backgrounds to time he spent painting Pueblo pottery when he was younger and his interest in modern elements that would make his work relevant in the art market. But according to recent scholarship, Tsireh avoided portraying esoteric aspects of Pueblo rituals, like ceremonial settings and specific objects, to safeguard sacred meaning. Secrecy around important cultural knowledge is important to Pueblo people. This knowledge is best conveyed orally to those who are trained to use it and not through recordings like drawings or photography, which can easily circulate in a wider context. Tsireh's art upholds Pueblo values and ultimately helped safeguard cultural knowledge from indiscriminate circulation.

**Awa Tsireh**, also known as **Alfonso Roybal**

San Ildefonso Pueblo

born 1898, San Ildefonso Pueblo, NM; died ca. 1955, San Ildefonso Pueblo, NM

***Ram and Antelope***

ca. 1925–30

watercolor and ink on paper

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Corbin-Henderson Collection, Gift of Alice H. Rossin, 1979.144.50

In the 1920s, Awa Tsireh experimented with compositions that combine animal figures and abstract designs. The semicircular form seen here represents a rainbow, which in Pueblo thought is the demarcation between terrestrial and extraterrestrial worlds. The thin black lines that descend from its center signify rain, and the stepped forms at its base, mountains. The circular form in the sky is the sun. While using symbols from Pueblo culture, Tsireh shows only enough to intrigue the uninitiated, while conveying deeper information and meaning to Pueblo people with the ritual knowledge necessary to understand the interrelated meaning of these symbols.

**Marita Dingus**

born 1956, Seattle, WA

***Untitled Bowl***

ca. 2005

wire and found objects

Boise Art Museum Permanent Collection, Gift of Ben and Aileen Krohn

This delicate vessel, made of wire, strands of old Christmas tree lights, and other found objects, is a metaphor for the treatment of enslaved people of African descent. By using materials that are normally discarded, the artist celebrates the resilience and beauty of spirit in people who have had to overcome the harsh realities of colonialism.

**Marita Dingus**

born 1956, Seattle, WA

***Green Leaves***

2001

mixed media

Whatcom Museum Permanent Collection, Gift of the Washington Art Consortium through gift of Safeco Insurance, a member of the Liberty Mutual Group, 2010.53.18

Between college and graduate school, Marita Dingus spent a summer working with a road crew in Washington State, picking up trash along highways. The experience sharpened her commitment to environmentalism and made the reuse of materials a central component of her work. Here, bottle caps, telephone wire, fabric scraps, bells, and aluminum cans have been salvaged and repurposed to create an exuberant composition that expresses growth and rebirth. Dingus says, “My art draws upon relics from the African Diaspora. The discarded materials represent how people of African descent were used during the institution of slavery and colonialism, then discarded, but who found ways to repurpose themselves and thrive in a hostile world.”

**Rubén Trejo**

born 1937, Saint Paul, MN; died 2009, Spokane, WA

***Roots***

1982

steel, wood, metal, and wood shavings

Collection of the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, University of Oregon, Museum purchase

In *Roots*, Rubén Trejo blends elements of abstraction with recognizable objects. The work’s title is evocative of his personal story, suggesting the struggle and reward of exploring familial and cultural ties. Trejo began a teaching position at Eastern Washington University in Cheney, Washington, in 1973. Over the next thirty years, he nurtured a vibrant and welcoming community for Chicax students there and committed his art practice to cultural reclamation. Trejo was deeply influenced by the artistic legacy of Mexico, which informed his identity as a Chicano man living in the Pacific Northwest: “In all of my works I feel like I am trying to be conscious of history, of our multiple histories, where they intersect and where they divide,” he explained in 2001. “I am acutely aware of how language, quite literally, shapes who we are.”

**James Lavadour**

Walla Walla

born 1951, Pendleton, OR

***Fire and Bones***

1990–91

oil on linen

Boise Art Museum Permanent Collection, Museum Purchase, 1993

James Lavadour learns about the land by walking it, internalizing its rhythms and curves. His work reflects both external and hidden elements of the landscape. In this two-panel painting, a skeletal figure rises out of the ridge, revealing the “bones” of the mountain. The left panel refers to natural occurrences of fire as well as the passion that the artist feels for his home terrain in eastern Oregon's Blue Mountains. Lavadour states, “A painting is a structure for the extraordinary and informative events of nature that are otherwise invisible.”

**Marie Watt**

Seneca

born 1967, Seattle, WA

***Canopy (Odd One)***

2005

salvaged industrial yellow cedar and steel rebar

Boise Art Museum Permanent Collection, Gift of Driek and Michael Zirinsky

Marie Watt uses symbolically charged materials to explore ideas related to her First Nations heritage. In the Seneca Nation and other Indigenous communities, blankets are given to honor people who attend important events, such as weddings and other ceremonies. In *Canopy (Odd One)*, Watt salvaged an old-growth timber once used as a beam in a warehouse and had it carved to represent a stack of folded blankets. She intentionally kept the steel rebar intact, reclaiming the beam's history, reaching back through its use as industrial infrastructure to its origin in a forest now destroyed, and offering it a contemporary life.

**Marie Watt**

Seneca

born 1967, Seattle, WA

***Witness (Quamichan Potlatch 1913)***

2015

reclaimed wool blankets, embroidery floss, and thread

Collection of the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, University of Oregon. This work was acquired with the assistance of the Ford Family Foundation through a special grant program managed by the Oregon Arts Commission, and additional support from the Hartz FUNd for Contemporary Art

A Hudson's Bay point blanket is the backdrop for Marie Watt's embroidered scene of a Coast Salish nation's potlatch. The Canadian and U.S. governments banned these gift-giving ceremonial feasts from 1885 until the 1950s. Unlike the original 1913 photograph of this event (shown below), Watt's version shows a group of figures with fists raised in protest. Watt also appears with her two small daughters on the right side of the blanket. The younger one peeks over her mother's shoulder to meet our gaze. A tall stack of blankets behind her refers to the great displays of generosity at potlatches, as well as Watt's own sculptural and installation work.



Quamichan Potlatch, Coast Salish, 1913. Photograph by Reverend Tate. Image PN1500, courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives.

### **Michael Brophy**

born 1960, Portland, OR

#### ***Beaver Trade***

2002

oil on canvas

Boise Art Museum Permanent Collection, Collectors Forum Purchase, 2008

Brophy's paintings explore the dramatic changes that have occurred in the Northwest landscape across time, while reflecting on the complex relationship between humans and nature. Human destruction is indicated in the painting by footprints embedded in a large totem and leading to a figure dressed in eighteenth-century colonial clothing. A white flag bears the Latin phrase *PRO PELLE CUTEM*, meaning "a pelt for a skin," the motto of the fur-trading Hudson's Bay Company. Felled branches and a flooded landscape further allude to the environmental harm caused by human

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actions. "I'm not interested in a romanticized or sanitized vision of nature," the artist says, "but one in which the marks of civilization are given their due. I like the idea of nature on the edge, with people pressing against it."

**Laura Aguilar**

born 1959, San Gabriel, CA; died 2018, Long Beach, CA

***Nature Self-Portrait #11***

1996

gelatin silver print

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the American Women's History Initiative Acquisitions Pool, administered by the Smithsonian American Women's History Initiative, 2021.27.4

Laura Aguilar's identity as a queer Chicana informed her work as an artist throughout her career. In the *Nature Self-Portrait* series, Aguilar uses her own nude body as both sculptural object and photographic subject, juxtaposing the soft folds in her flesh with the harsh elements of the natural landscape surrounding her. The duality of her introverted posture and the extroverted vulnerability of her nude body invite the viewer to reconsider conventional notions of beauty and body politics in relation to the female form in art and photography. Aguilar's effortless existence within this landscape also reclaims the American Southwest by a person of Mexican descent for her community. She has said, "My photography has always provided me with an opportunity to open myself up and see the world around me. And most of all, photography makes me look within."

**Fritz Scholder**

Luiseño

born 1937, Breckenridge, MN; died 2005, Phoenix, AZ

***Indian and Contemporary Chair***

1970

oil on linen

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Judge and Mrs. Oliver Seth, 1983.111

Throughout his life, Fritz Scholder struggled with his dual identity as a Native American and white man. He rejected the label of "American Indian artist" and instead found his inspiration in mid-twentieth century artists such as Wayne Thiebaud. Later in his career, Scholder began creating images of Indigenous people in direct response to what he perceived as the "over-romanticized paintings of the 'noble savage.'" In the past, white artists have often depicted Indigenous subjects in natural settings, grounding their identity within the landscape. In *Indian and Contemporary Chair*, Scholder's choice to place his subject indoors, in



a mid-century modern chair, undercuts stereotypes that confine Native people to nostalgic landscapes, and points to the complexities of living in a modern world.

**Ka'ila Farrell-Smith**

Klamath Modoc

born 1982, Ashland, OR

***Enrollment***

2014

oil on canvas

Collection of the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, University of Oregon. General Acquisition Fund purchase made possible with support from Native American Studies, University of Oregon

Ka'ila Farrell-Smith painted this androgynous figure, wrapped in a Hudson's Bay point blanket, after she received her tribal enrollment number as a citizen of the Klamath Tribes.

Citing Indigenous aesthetics as influential, she makes work that honors ancestral lineage. She has explained, "*Enrollment* is a painting that visually explores the complexities of Tribal enrollment rules like blood quantum and the trendiness of Hudson's Bay Company's wool blankets that were historically used to spread smallpox disease to Indigenous communities, and navigates contested terrains that inform contemporary Indigenous identity."

**Rick Bartow**

Mad River Wiyot

born 1946, Newport, OR; died 2016, Newport, OR

***Buck***

2015

acrylic on canvas

Collection of the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, University of Oregon. Gift of the Estate of Rick Bartow and Froelick Gallery

Rick Bartow spent most of his life on the Oregon coast but also traveled widely, and wove imagery and influences from around the world into his art. He served in the Vietnam War and, following his recovery from PTSD and alcoholism, frequently made images of himself to express his thoughts about culture and identity. He called art-making his "affordable therapy."

Bartow painted *Buck*, his final self-portrait, two years after suffering a stroke. He included his wheelchair in a rare depiction of his physical vulnerability. The three-chevron insignia refers to Bartow's rank as a non-commissioned sergeant, or "Buck," during the war. The words "Indian Hero" prompt viewers to consider his veteran status, his Native American and European heritage, and contemporary Indigenous or Native American identity as a subject for art.

**Patrick Nagatani**

born 1945, Chicago, IL; died 2017, Albuquerque, NM

***Uranium Tailings, Anaconda Minerals Corporation, Laguna Pueblo Reservation, New Mexico***

1990–93

***B-36/Mark 17 H-Bomb Accident (May 22, 1957), 5 1/2 Miles So. of Gibson Blvd., Albuquerque, New Mexico from the series Nuclear Enchantments***

1990–93

***Trinity Site, Jornada Del Muerto, New Mexico***

1989–93

***Golden Eagle, United Nuclear Corporation Uranium Mill and Tailings, Churchrock, New Mexico***

1990–93

***A7-D, 150th TAC Fighter Group, New Mexico Air National Guard, Kirtland Air Force Base, Albuquerque, New Mexico***

1989

***Radon Gas, Elementary School Classroom, Albuquerque, New Mexico***

1990

from the series *Nuclear Enchantments*

1988–93

chromogenic prints

Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Gift of Dr. Mark Reichman, UMFA2003.25.28, UMFA2003.25.41, UMFA2003.25.24, UMFA2003.25.30, UMFA2003.25.37, and UMFA2003.25.52

As a Japanese American born just thirteen days after the U.S. bombing of Hiroshima, Nagatani was fascinated with New Mexico's nuclear weapons industry. As he studied the contaminated sites of uranium mines, he also learned about the oldest continuous culture in North America, the Pueblo Indians, whose land and people were disproportionately impacted by U.S. atomic ambitions.

The surreal scenes of Nagatani's *Nuclear Enchantment* series use elaborate sets, hand coloring, and printing techniques to weave together images of toxic test sites, schools, atomic monuments, radioactive waste dumps, and sovereign Native lands. The artist exposes the abuses of the New Mexican landscape and its inhabitants perpetrated by the mining industry and the military in answering the government's thirst for atomic power.

## **Memory Makers**

Artists act as transmitters of cultural memory as they give form to neglected histories. Using documentation, reconstruction, portraiture, and manipulation of archival imagery, they bring the past vividly into the present. This group of artists explores Black, Indigenous, Asian American, Latinx, and gendered experiences in the American West, going beyond the familiar accounts of European colonizers, bringing lived histories and identities that are essential to a truthful history. Indigenous artists often remind us that these memories are made on their ancestral homelands and represent living cultures, despite a history of government policies designed to make Indigenous people forget culture, language, and identity. By bearing witness to the traumas of the past through visual storytelling, artists express resistance and ensure that cultural memory lives on.

### **Miguel A. Gandert**

born 1956, Española, NM

#### ***El Comanche David, Talpa, NM***

1996

#### ***Los Cautivos, Talpa, NM***

1995

digital exhibition prints made from the original gelatin silver prints

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Smithsonian Latino Initiatives Pool, administered by the Smithsonian Latino Center, 2016.20.8 and 2016.20.7

Miguel Gandert's photographs of *genízaros* add levels of complexity to our understanding of Native heritage in New Mexico. *Genízaros* are descendants of de-tribalized Indians from various tribes—the Utes, Apaches, Comanches, Kiowas, Navajos, and Pawnees—whose ancestors were taken captive during the Spanish colonial period. Many were forced into indentured servitude, where they adapted to Spanish culture while passing elements of their Native traditions and beliefs to their descendants. Gandert captures their present-day ceremonies, like *Los Cautivos* (or *The Captives*), which dramatize aspects of their history. Gandert's photographs are a testament to *genízaro* resilience in the face of adversity.

### **Al Rendón**

born 1957, San Antonio, TX

#### ***Horse reining rayar***

1986, printed 2015

#### ***Charreada Warm Up***

1981, printed 2015

***Adelita***

1987, printed 2015

***Don Socrates***

1998, printed 2015

digital exhibition prints made from the original gelatin silver prints

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Smithsonian Latino Initiatives Pool, administered by the Smithsonian Latino Center, 2016.6.3, 2016.6.1, 2016.6.4, and 2016.6.7

In the 1980s, Al Rendón began documenting the elaborate performances and dress of the San Antonio Charro Association in Texas (est. 1947), which was the first established organization of competitive Mexican American horsemen and women in the United States. He captures the traditions of *charros* and *charras*, whose equestrian feats are rooted in Spanish and Mexican ranch culture, which emerged in the sixteenth century when the Spanish introduced horses and cattle to the Americas. U.S. cowboy culture is an outgrowth of this history. Hints of our contemporary world creep into Rendón's photographs, suggesting how these traditions live in the present. Some photographs undermine Mexican "bandito" stereotypes common in racist "cowboy and Indian" films. His photographs assert *charro* customs as fixtures in the U.S.–Mexico borderlands.

**Roger Shimomura**

born 1939, Seattle, WA

***American Infamy #2***

2006

acrylic on canvas

Boise Art Museum Permanent Collection, Purchased with donations to the Roger Shimomura Acquisitions Fund

*American Infamy #2* portrays Camp Minidoka in Idaho, where Roger Shimomura and his family were incarcerated from the spring of 1942 until summer 1944. This painting is made in the style of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Japanese Muromachi era *byōbu* screens and it details living conditions under the camp's armed guards. The artist exposes the racial conflicts during World War II, when 120,000 Japanese Americans were unjustly imprisoned as a result of Executive Order 9066, and surfaces the internment camp in Idaho. Though Camp Minidoka is designated as a national historic site, its history remains relatively unknown, even among descendants of the people who were imprisoned there.

**Wendy Maruyama**

born 1952, La Junta, CO

***Minidoka***, from the series ***Tag Project***

2011

paper, ink, string, and thread

Boise Art Museum Permanent Collection, Collectors Forum Purchase, 2015

Wendy Maruyama began the *Tag Project* when she was conducting research about Executive Order 9066, which gave the U.S. military broad powers during World War II to incarcerate Japanese Americans. The project consists of ten paper sculptures, each representing a U.S. camp built to confine citizens and legal residents. Each sculpture consists of thousands of paper tags printed with the names and identification numbers of people incarcerated at one of the camps. Maruyama and a team of volunteers painstakingly recreated the tags using information from government archives. This sculpture represents detainees at Camp Minidoka in Idaho and serves as a visual reminder of the devastating impact this unjust policy had on tens of thousands of people and their descendants who continue to reside in this region.

**Christina Fernandez**

born 1965, Los Angeles, CA

***María's Great Expedition***

1995–96

digital exhibition prints and bilingual narrative

Exhibition prints are made from the original five gelatin silver prints, one chromogenic print, and one inkjet print.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen Endowment, 2012.11A–H

Fernandez's installation mimics the kind of museum display that tells the stories of European conquistadors or white U.S. expansionists in the Southwest. Rather than focus on these dominant histories, Fernandez turns to the story of her great-grandmother María González, the first member of her family to migrate to the United States from Mexico. The artist photographed herself in the guise of her relative and paired these images with detailed stories that relate her family history to larger accounts of the trials and milestones of Mexican migration and settlement in the early twentieth century. Fernandez pointedly adopts photography's evolving techniques from Depression-era documentary-style black-and-white prints to mid-century color snapshots—to highlight how Chicanx experiences have consistently been omitted from histories of the West.

**Ken Gonzales-Day**

born 1964, Santa Clara, CA

***Erased Lynchings***

2006

fifteen inkjet prints

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen Endowment, 2012.12.2A–O

These fifteen photographs are digitally altered reproductions of lynching postcards, which were widely circulated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Such postcards, meant to instill fear in targeted communities and often inscribed with racist language, were sometimes kept as macabre souvenirs. While lynching is historically associated with the murder of Black people in the American South, this work is based on postcards that come from Western states, where the lynching of Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinx populations has been largely erased from memory. By removing the victims from these images, Ken Gonzales-Day forces the viewer to focus on the white perpetrators of this violence, made mundane through repetition. He challenges us to consider lynching as a widespread trauma and acknowledge its destructive legacy and connection to Western expansion.

**Tony Gleaton**

born 1948, Detroit, MI; died 2015, Palo Alto, CA

***Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, Crow Agency, Montana***

2001, printed 2021

***Julian, San Diego County, California***

2001, printed 2021

***Pecos River, just north of its confluence with the Rio Bravo de Norte, with Mexico in the distance, Val Verde County, Texas.***

2001, printed 2021

Selections from the series *Manifest Destiny*

ca. 1999–2011

digital gelatin silver prints

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase, 2022.38.1, 2022.38.5, and 2022.38.4

Tony Gleaton's expansive landscapes and quiet views of man-made structures across the American West construct a history that is largely unknown. In 1999, Gleaton began traveling west of the Mississippi River to continue his career-long quest to research and document the experiences of the African diaspora across the Americas. Pairing evocative images with

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descriptive text that details events that transpired in specific places, Gleaton reveals how Black people participated in historical events that made the American West, from the Indian Wars to the Texas Revolution, the Gold Rush, Mid-West homesteading, and beyond. Gleaton's motivation was not only to document this forgotten, epic history, but to "undermine perceptions of the genesis of 'the West' [as we've come to see it]."

**Juan de Dios Mora**

born 1984, Yahualica, Mexico

***Montado a la Escoba Voladora (Riding the Flying Broom)***

2010

***Bien Arreglada (All Decked Out)***

2010

linocuts

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Frank K. Ribelin Endowment, 2019.35.2 and 2019.35.5

Juan de Dios Mora's prints emerge from his close observation of immigrant life in the border town of Laredo, Texas. His scenes of *vaqueros* (cowboys) riding flying brooms or driving exaggerated, powerful motorcycles, combine fantasy and realism to honor how Mexican immigrants make do and affirm their culture against the odds. The artist's father, who routinely repaired things with discarded scraps of metal and wood, inspired *Montado a la Escoba Voladora (Riding the Flying Broom)*. "Even when you don't have the right tools or technology," the artist said, "you can still be clever and creative." Mora's works also reconceive representations of the cowboy, showing how Southwest ranch culture is indebted to Mexico.

**Jacob Lawrence**

born 1917, Atlantic City, NJ; died 2000, Seattle, WA

***The Builders***

1980

gouache on paper

Whatcom Museum Permanent Collection, Gift of the Washington Art Consortium through gift of Safeco Insurance, a member of the Liberty Mutual Group

Lawrence's African American heritage and expression of Black identity are fundamental to his work. He made portraits of historical figures such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman and painted scenes of the Great Migration. A careful observer and storyteller, he also focused on scenes of the everyday.

Lawrence returned to the subject of builders over half a century. This theme refers to his own migration to the West and his time working with the WPA and New Deal programs, as it tells stories of aspiration, cooperation, and equality. The dynamic scene highlights the hard work and perseverance of the laborers rather than focusing on the completed building.

**Barbara Earl Thomas**

born 1948, Seattle, WA

***Night Crawlers and Earthworms***

2006

***Fish Eater***

2006

linocuts

Whatcom Museum Permanent Collection, Gift of the Washington Art Consortium through gift of Safeco Insurance, a member of the Liberty Mutual Group

Barbara Earl Thomas was a student of Jacob Lawrence at the University of Washington and, like him, is a narrative storyteller. In this work, as in many others, she incorporates themes of human connection and rituals of survival in her visual allegories as she draws on her family's migration from the American South to the Pacific Northwest in the 1940s.

These prints come from a series of eight linocuts titled *The Book of Fishing*, which elaborates the fisherman's story as Thomas has lived it. The artist shares that while fishing methods vary across cultures, the act of fishing is a common and eternal custom. She recalls that growing up, her family fished for bottom-feeding fish, which was a very different method of fishing from the salmon fishing of the Scandinavians and Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest. She says, "Bottom-fish people are a special kind of people because they are living off of what nobody else wants."

***NATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON THE TRAIL,  
A Contemporary American Indian Art Portfolio***

Commissioned by the Missoula Art Museum

2004–2005

On the occasion of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Commemoration in 2004, the Missoula Art Museum in Wyoming invited fifteen Native American artists to participate in a limited-edition print project. Three of the fifteen prints created for the portfolio are on view here. On the screen below you will find images of the entire portfolio.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition (1803–1806), also known as the Corps of Discovery Expedition, was commissioned by President Thomas Jefferson. The Corps was a group of U.S.

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Army and civilian volunteers, under the command of Captain Meriwether Lewis and Second Lieutenant William Clark, who were charged with exploring the western portion of North America by traveling across the Continental Divide to the Pacific Coast and back. Their objectives included mapping the newly acquired Louisiana Purchase, finding a practical route across the western half of the continent, and establishing U.S. ownership over the land occupied by many Indigenous tribes along the Missouri River before European countries tried to claim it. Sacagawea, a member of the Lemhi Shoshone tribe, was a valued member of the Corps. She advised Clark on optimal routes through difficult terrain, served as an interpreter and, through her presence, conveyed the peaceful intent of the group when encountering Indigenous people.

Corwin Clairmont, a Salish and Kootenai tribal member who was a co-curator of the project, noted that the portfolio provided “an opportunity to present a point of view that is often overlooked and may be in direct contrast with the celebratory mood of many Lewis and Clark admirers.”

**Neal Ambrose-Smith**

Salish

born 1966, Pasadena, TX

*Now That's a Coyote Story / sêy lu pn sqwllu* from *Native Perspectives on the Trail*

2004

monotype and screen print, edition 10 of 24

Boise Art Museum Permanent Collection, Museum Purchase with a Grant from the Idaho Governor's Lewis and Clark Trail Committee, 2006.009

In *Now That's a Coyote Story / sêy lu pn sqwllu*, Ambrose-Smith relates the traditional Native American character to modern “trickery.” Indian teaching stories often feature Coyote, a trickster who can change shape and form to teach a lesson. In this print, alongside images of corn and a food nutrition label, we see Coyote wearing a winking mask. Ambrose-Smith weaves a traditional warning into his visual story. “Coyote knows the importance of corn for the people. He sees that GMO corn can be trickery, but how is it that the people come to accept it? He sees that someone else is also crafty in his or her ways. Coyote sees all.”

**Melissa Bob**

Lummi

born 1982, Bellingham, WA

*Ways of Seeing, Ways of Being . . . Then and Now* from *Native Perspectives on the Trail*

2004

collagraph, serigraph, collage, edition 10 of 25

Boise Art Museum Permanent Collection, Museum Purchase with a Grant from the Idaho Governor's Lewis and Clark Trail Committee, 2006.009

*Ways of Seeing, Ways of Being . . . Then and Now* contrasts two worlds—one before and the other after contact with Europeans. The upper portion of the print reflects a natural existence with green, forested land. The lower portion depicts the post-colonial landscape as a dull, gray, over-developed mass. The red lifeline of pre-contact tribal life is vigorous and dynamic while, in the artist's view, post-contact Native culture is flatlining. The lifeline does continue, however, as Bob signifies the passage of time through the changed landscape, perhaps implying that while Native culture has been largely absorbed into the dominant society, it has not completely died away.

**Jason Elliott Clark**

Algonquin, Creek, Swiss, Scottish  
born 1967, Panorama City, CA

***Jefferson's Saints Surveying the Real Estate* from *Native Perspectives on the Trail***

2004

relief print with gold leaf

Boise Art Museum Permanent Collection, Museum Purchase with a Grant from the Idaho Governor's Lewis and Clark Trail Committee, 2006.009

Using dark humor, *Jefferson's Saints Surveying the Real Estate* addresses the Corps of Discovery Expedition and its consequences. The expedition leaders wear spacesuits, signifying that they are not merely out of place, but in a land profoundly distant and different from their home. These explorers, sent by President Jefferson, wear golden halos even as they stand on sacred Native burial grounds. The image and its title suggest that Lewis and Clark, though revered by many historians, were in the West as glorified real estate agents for the government to claim lands already “discovered” and long occupied by Indigenous people.

**Boundary Breakers**

Artists unsettle common beliefs that inform the popular understanding of the American West. They remind us that the West is not simply a geographic region; those living there have complex identities and histories that transcend political borders. Using maps and documentary photography, some artists address physical borders and consider their impact on people and cultures. Others rely on poignant symbols to re-envision the movement of people across the land and water. They break down simplified notions of personal identity, affirm their lived histories, and refute romanticized imagery. They all consider form, process, and subject, question previous perspectives, and invite new ways of understanding the American West.

**Gail Tremblay**

Mi'kmaq and Onondaga descent  
born 1945, Buffalo, NY; died 2023, Olympia, WA

***An Iroquois Dreams That the Tribes of the Middle East Will Take the Message of Deganawida to Heart and Make Peace***

2009

16mm film, leader, rayon cord, and thread

Whatcom Museum Purchase, 2010.54.1

Since the 1980s, artist, writer, and activist Gail Tremblay wove baskets using scraps of 35mm and 16mm film. She culled the film from a variety of sources, including old movie trailers and outdated educational documentaries. To add variations of pattern and color, Tremblay incorporated lengths of leader film, inserting white, black, blue, green, or vibrant red tones. The titles of her works sometimes point toward the content of her film sources. Of this series the artist writes, “I enjoyed the notion of recycling film and gaining control over a medium historically used by both Hollywood and documentary filmmakers to stereotype American Indians. I relished the irony of making film take on the traditional fancy stitch patterns of our ash and sweetgrass baskets.”

**V. Maldonado**

born 1976, Changuitiro, Michoacán, Mexico

***The Fallen***

2018

acrylic on canvas

Collection of the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, University of Oregon. This work was acquired with the assistance of The Ford Family Foundation through a special grant program managed by the Oregon Arts Commission, 2019:22.1

V. Maldonado’s art and performances “take up space”—physically and philosophically—in white-majority spaces. Maldonado uses the imagery and cultural significance of lucha libre wrestlers, especially masks, to represent double-consciousness and how marginalized groups and individuals often feel both seen and invisible. They began creating large, vibrant paintings inspired by the concept of freedom in 2018. In exploring and celebrating their complex identity, Maldonado rejects the impositions of gender, race, and settler-colonial myths.

**George Tsutakawa**

born 1910, Seattle, WA; died 1997, Seattle, WA

***North Cascades***

date unknown  
sumi ink on rice paper

Whatcom Museum Permanent Collection, Gift of the Washington Art Consortium through gift of Safeco Insurance, a member of the Liberty Mutual Group, 2017.16.36

With an economy of calligraphic line and form, George Tsutakawa's bold *Sumi-e* (brush and ink) painting captures a distinctly Pacific Northwest landscape. As the artist uses an Asian painting style to render an American scene, he demonstrates that the Pacific Northwest and the Far East, linked by a land bridge in the distant past, can be joined again in the present through artistic style and cultural reference.

Tsutakawa was a sculptor and painter, acclaimed for creating dozens of public fountains in both the United States and Japan. He frequently described his experience as a Japanese American and as an artist influenced by both Eastern and Western art as living "between cultures." When asked, "Are you American or Japanese?" he would respond, "I'm neither, I'm both."

**Angela Ellsworth**

born 1964, Palo Alto, CA

***Seer Bonnet XI and XII***

2010  
pearl corsage pins, fabric, and steel

Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Purchased with funds from the UMFA Young Benefactors and the Phyllis Cannon Wattis Endowment for Modern and Contemporary Art, UMFA2010.16.2 and UMFA2010.16.3

In this series, Ellsworth refers to a group of white settler women who donned homemade sunbonnets as they arrived in Utah in the middle of the nineteenth century. The artist, a fifth-generation Mormon and self-identified feminist and queer artist, envisions her bonnets as representing each of the thirty-five wives of Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon faith. According to Mormon theology, Smith received prophetic powers from "seer stones" to translate the Book of Mormon, but in Ellsworth's reimagined history, the sparkling *Seer Bonnets* endow Smith's wives with their own visionary and revelatory powers. In her work, Ellsworth highlights relationships of love that have been overlooked or feared, and these bonnets, with their sharp, menacing interiors, reveal the struggles and the resilience of a unique community of women.

**Marcos Ramírez ERRE**

born 1961, Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico

**David Taylor**

born 1965, Beaufort, SC

### ***DeLIMITations Portfolio***

2016

archival pigment prints and Adams-Onis broadsheet

Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Purchased with funds from The Phyllis Cannon Wattis Endowment Fund, UMFA2019.9.1–10, UMFA2019.9.14–31, UMFA2019.9.34–39, UMFA2019.9.42–43, UMFA2019.9.45–46, UMFA2019.9.48

In this photographic series the artists document their epic effort to mark and photograph the never-before-surveyed 1821 border between the United States and Mexico. It presents the beautiful diversity of landscape and settlement in the American West while drawing our attention to the constructed and fluid nature of man-made borders. “Before this was Mexico or the U.S.,” Ramírez points out, “this whole land was Native American.”

In the 1819 Adams-Onís Treaty between the United States and Spain, which was ratified by the newly independent Mexico in 1821, the United States renounced “forever all their rights, claims, and pretensions” to the lands south of the treaty line. Yet, today those lands are known as the U.S. states of Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Texas, Colorado, Kansas, Wyoming, and Oklahoma. The artists offer the treaty text to visitors to underscore the fallibility of promises and the force of U.S. westward expansion.

### **Hung Liu**

born 1948, Changchun, China; died 2021, Oakland, CA

### ***Mandarin Ducks***

2005

oil on canvas

Boise Art Museum Permanent Collection, Gift of Anita Kay Hardy in Loving Memory of Her Parents, Earl M. and LaVane M. Hardy

Hung Liu was trained as an artist in China during the Cultural Revolution, which forced her to conform to a constrained, academic style. She immigrated to the United States in 1984. Through her images, she shows resistance to being assimilated into the stereotypes often imposed upon her subjects. The painting’s dripping appearance is Liu’s unique style that bears no resemblance to the rigid academicism of the Chinese Socialist Realist tenets in which she was trained.

This painting portrays Polly Bemis, the most renowned Chinese woman in the West. She is wearing her 1894 wedding dress and is surrounded by traditional Chinese motifs associated with marriage, including Mandarin ducks and water lilies. Polly became a heroine, especially among women and people of Chinese descent in Idaho, because she overcame domination and

subjugation to forge her own independence and success as a businesswoman. She married a local saloon owner to escape deportation and remained with him until his death in 1922.

**Raphael Montañez Ortiz**

born 1934, New York City

***Cowboy and “Indian” Film***

1957–58

16mm film; black and white, sound

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Gary Wolkowitz, 2011.31

In the 1950s, Raphael Montañez Ortiz began exploring destruction as the basis for his art making. To create *Cowboy and “Indian” Film*, he used a tomahawk to chop up several copies of Anthony Mann’s classic Western, *Winchester ’73* (1950). He then placed the hacked strips of film in a medicine bag, shook them while singing a war chant, and reassembled the snippets, boldly jumbling their narrative, visual, and sound elements. Ortiz used this shaman-like process to suggest and honor his Yaqui Indigenous heritage. Through his invented ritual, Ortiz sought, in his words, to “redeem the indigenous wound” of European colonialism. This work disrupts the familiar cowboy versus Indian narrative common in Western films.

**Alfredo Arreguín**

born 1935, Morelia, Mexico; died 2023, Seattle, WA

***Bitterns***

1980

oil on canvas

Whatcom Museum Permanent Collection, Gift of the Washington Art Consortium through gift of Safeco Insurance, a member of the Liberty Mutual Group, 2010.53.1

Ecology, nature, and the preservation of the environment are pressing themes for Arreguín. Birds are often metaphors for fleeting memories of childhood, communion with and reverence for nature, and references to travel and migration.

Alfredo Arreguín immigrated to Seattle from Morelia, Mexico, in the late 1950s. Shortly after, he was drafted into the U.S. Army and served in Korea. While in Asia, he visited Japan and was introduced to the work of Hokusai, the Edo-period *ukiyo-e* (woodblock) master. These intricate prints have been as strong an influence on Arreguín’s work as the patterned mosaics and baroque architecture of his native Mexico. Over the last fifty years, he developed a lyrical and decorative painting style, which he employed to explore ideas of interconnectedness, often using what he described as a lacelike screen to overlay his compositions. In his graceful combinations of Asian and Chicano themes and elements, we can trace his journey across cultural borders and barriers.

**Wendy Red Star**

Apsáalooke/Crow

born 1981, Billings, MT

***Four Seasons: Fall, Winter, Spring, Summer***

2006

archival pigment print, edition 27

Boise Art Museum Permanent Collection, Collectors Forum Purchase, 2019

In this series of photographs, Wendy Red Star depicts herself in traditional Crow dress within four fabricated, majestic landscapes—one for each season. Inflatable animals, plastic flowers, AstroTurf™, and other artificial materials reference and make fun of the diorama settings in which Native people are often depicted in natural history museums. Panoramic images of the Western landscape, commercially produced in the 1970s, hang in the background. By picturing herself in a natural history museum display, the artist comments on the false assumption that Native American culture is frozen in the past. Through her presence, she counteracts this destructive “vanished people” stereotype.

**Delilah Montoya**

born 1965, Fort Worth, TX

***Desire Lines, Baboquivari Peak, AZ***

2004, printed 2008

inkjet print

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the Gilberto Cardenas Latino Art Collection, 2011.52.1

Delilah Montoya’s work focuses on the rich and complex histories of the landscape and communities of the borderlands between Mexico and the United States. *Desire Lines: Baboquivari Peak, AZ* shows the Tohono O’odham Reservation, which straddles the border of Arizona and the Sonora region of Mexico. The mountains seen in the distance are the site of the Tohono O’odham creation story. In having to travel between these regions, the people of the O’odham community become both migrants and natives within their own ancestral homeland. Scattered throughout the landscape are water jugs, placed along the reservation border to provide water to migrants on their journey. Montoya explicitly rejects the doctrine of Manifest Destiny and the misconception that these lands were unexplored terrain prior to the invasion of white settlers and the creation of borders between two nations.

**Sandra C. Fernández**

born 1964, New York City

***Cruzado (Settled In)***

2015

etching, chine collé, thread drawings, and blind embossing on paper

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Frank K. Ribelin Endowment, 2019.34.3

Fernández’s layered print brings the poignant history of the U.S.–Mexico border to life. Before the European conquest of North America, this area was home to Indigenous communities who have lived in the Southwest for hundreds of years. Later it was claimed by several colonial and national powers—Spain, Mexico, and the United States. Fernández’s linear forms evoke these shifting boundaries and the paths of migrants through the land and water. The artist’s needle pokes holes in the paper, suggesting wounds, while her stitches seem to tie the regions together. Embossed on the print itself is text written during the Spanish conquest. This historical reference raises the specter of colonialism as the origin of current crises like perilous migrations and political strife.

**Angel Rodríguez-Díaz**

born 1955, San Juan, PR; died 2023, San Antonio, TX

***The Protagonist of an Endless Story***

1993

oil on canvas

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase made possible in part by the Smithsonian Latino Initiatives Pool and the Smithsonian Institution Collections Acquisition Program, 1996.19

Known for his richly textured and painterly style, Angel Rodríguez-Díaz spent the last several decades painting portraits of important cultural icons of San Antonio and the Southwestern United States. The “protagonist” of this painting is renowned Chicana novelist and poet Sandra Cisneros, best known for her debut novel, *The House on Mango Street*. Cisneros stands before a fiery sunset, dressed in a traditional Mexican skirt embroidered with sequined imagery that refers to her profession as a writer. Her commanding pose, reminiscent of historic European portraiture, proclaims that she will endure in her native landscape. In the work’s title, as well as its composition, the artist asserts that Chicana culture will not be erased.

**Ángel Rodríguez-Díaz**

nació 1955, San Juan, Puerto Rico; murió 2023, San Antonio, TX

***La protagonista de una historia sin fin***

1993

óleo sobre tela



Museo Smithsonian del Arte Americano, la compra por el Museo fue posible en parte por el Pool de Iniciativas Latinas y el Programa de Adquisición de Colecciones de la Institución Smithsonian, 1996.<sup>19</sup>

Conocido por su estilo pictórico de gran riqueza de texturas, Ángel Rodríguez-Díaz dedicó las últimas décadas a pintar retratos de importantes íconos culturales de San Antonio y del sudoeste de los Estados Unidos. La “protagonista” de este cuadro es la renombrada novelista y poetisa chicana Sandra Cisneros, más conocida por su primera novela, *La casa en Mango Street*. Cisneros está de pie ante una ardiente puesta de sol, vestida con una falda tradicional mexicana con imágenes bordadas en lentejuelas, que hacen referencia a su profesión de escritora. Su pose imponente, que recuerda a los retratos históricos europeos, proclama que perdurará en su paisaje natal. En el título de la obra, así como en su composición, el artista afirma que la cultura chicanx no será borrada.