

Chapter Three





WRITTEN BY TED LOOS

INTERIOR PHOTOGRAPHS BY YSA PÉREZ
STUDIO PHOTOGRAPHS BY SHAYLA BLATCHFORD

HANDS OF TIME

Indigenous art is set to have a blockbuster year in the art world, with big shows at national institutions and American representation at the Venice Biennale. An intimate look inside the growing movement, from one major collector's home in Palm Beach to one leading artist's New Mexico studio.

DETAIL OF "I LOVE," 2022, BY JEFFREY GIBSON.



ABOVE: EXTERIOR OF BECKY GOCHMAN'S PALM BEACH HOME. OPPOSITE: TWO WORKS BY JANE HYDEN DRAPE THE DINING TABLE. IN THE FOREGROUND, "SHOE GAME," 2023, AND BEHIND, "JOURNEY BACK HOME 'FROM THE LONG WALK,'" 2023.



For Indigenous artists, 1992 looked like it might be the year for a breakthrough. Native makers had been significantly underrepresented in the biggest American museums and galleries, but the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus arriving in North America—an event whose meaning and legacy have been substantially re-evaluated in the years since—provided the first glimmers of hope, with institutions finally featuring work they had long ignored.

"There was this sudden interest in Native art," says Kathleen Ash-Milby, a member of the Navajo Nation and the Curator of Native American Art at the Portland Art Museum. "All these group exhibits popped up, and some were important. But then it fell off immediately. It wasn't really about the art, it was about the anniversary."

But in 2024, however, "it feels different this time," says Ash-Milby. This year looks to be a landmark one for Indigenous art that promises a staying power in the mainstream art world, something that has been quietly building over decades.

Ash-Milby is right in the heart of the surge, as a co-commissioner (with Abigail Winograd and Louis Grachos) of the US Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, opening in April, which will feature the striking, colorful work of Jeffrey

Gibson, one of the most influential contemporary artists working today and perhaps best known for his elaborately beaded objects, including punching bags.

A member of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and of Cherokee descent who is based in New York's Hudson Valley, Gibson will be the first Native artist to represent the United States at the venerable event, which is having its 60th anniversary this year. SITE Santa Fe and the Portland Art Museum are the commissioning institutions.

"It's so important for Native peoples that we're going to be represented on that stage," Ash-Milby says. "I almost can't put it into words."

The art world is hardly the only place where Indigenous cultures have been newly centered, with pop-culture touchstones like the award-winning Martin Scorsese movie *Killers of the Flower Moon*—Lily Gladstone, whose background is Blackfeet and Nez Perce, won a Golden Globe for her work in the film in January—and the acclaimed TV show *Reservation Dogs*.

While it's difficult to pinpoint why this movement is on the rise, the recent increased visibility of social justice movements, including Black Lives Matter, has softened the ground for Indigenous creations and diverse representation to take root more firmly. "We benefit from the activism, and we



ON A CONSOLE TABLE BY THE WINDOW SITS
“GOOCH S’ÁAXWU WOLF HEADDRESS,” 2023,
BY JAMES P. JOHNSON, WHILE “THE
SPANIARD,” 1988, BY JAUNE QUICK-TO-SEE
SMITH HANGS BETWEEN TWO ARCHWAYS.

benefit from the term BIPOC,” says the artist Dyani White Hawk, referring to the fact that the “I” stands for *Indigenous*.

Perhaps unexpectedly, Palm Beach is a hub of this current flowering, too. The art collector and equestrian Becky Gochman, who splits her time between Palm Beach and New York City, co-founded an Indigenous-focused initiative in 2021 called the Forge Project.

Working with her co-founder, former New York City gallerist Zach Feuer, Gochman set up Forge in New York’s Hudson Valley as a lending library of sorts, buying Indigenous artworks so they can be lent and donated to institutions. But that sounds a bit passive in describing what Forge really is: “We’re working as activists for the library,” as Feuer puts it.

Gochman is a former art teacher who is married to David Gochman, whose fortune is derived from a former family business Academy Sports + Outdoors (they have been listed as America’s 109th richest family by *Forbes*). She also set up the Gochman Family Collection, a parallel trove of art that Feuer advises on, and she lives with dozens of those works in both Florida and New York; a significant portion of the collection is devoted to Indigenous artists.

As part of their work in this arena, the Gochmans also gave \$25 million to Bard College, a gift matched by philanthropist George Soros, to set up a Center for Indigenous Studies and fund other related activities like scholarships and faculty positions.

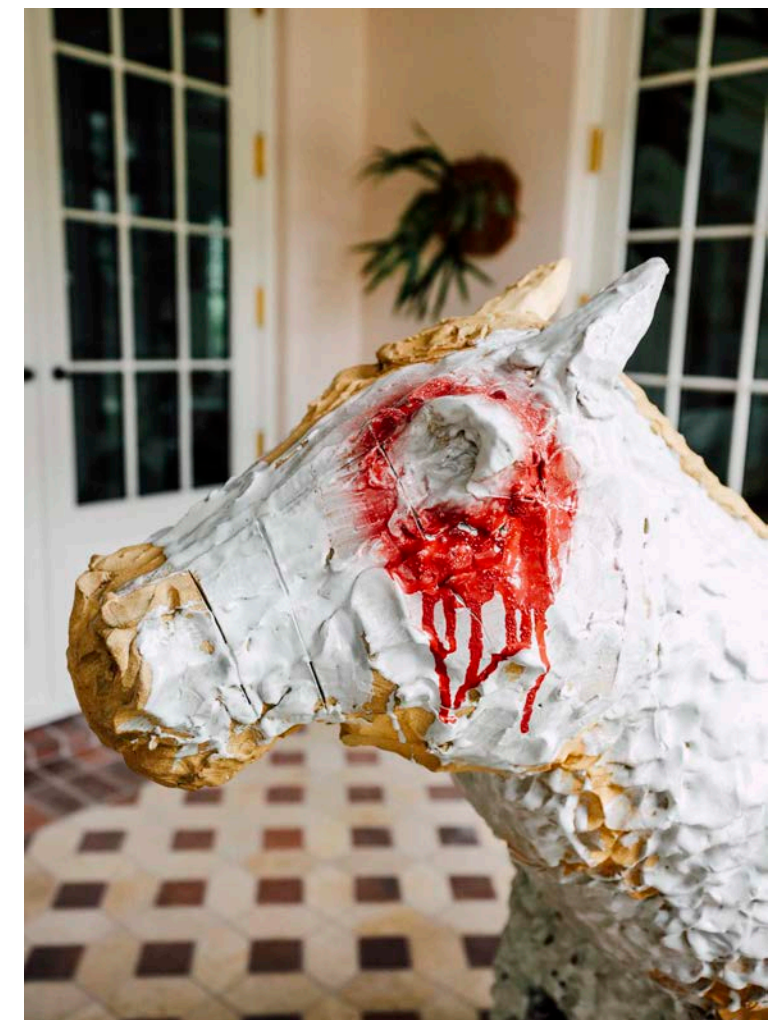
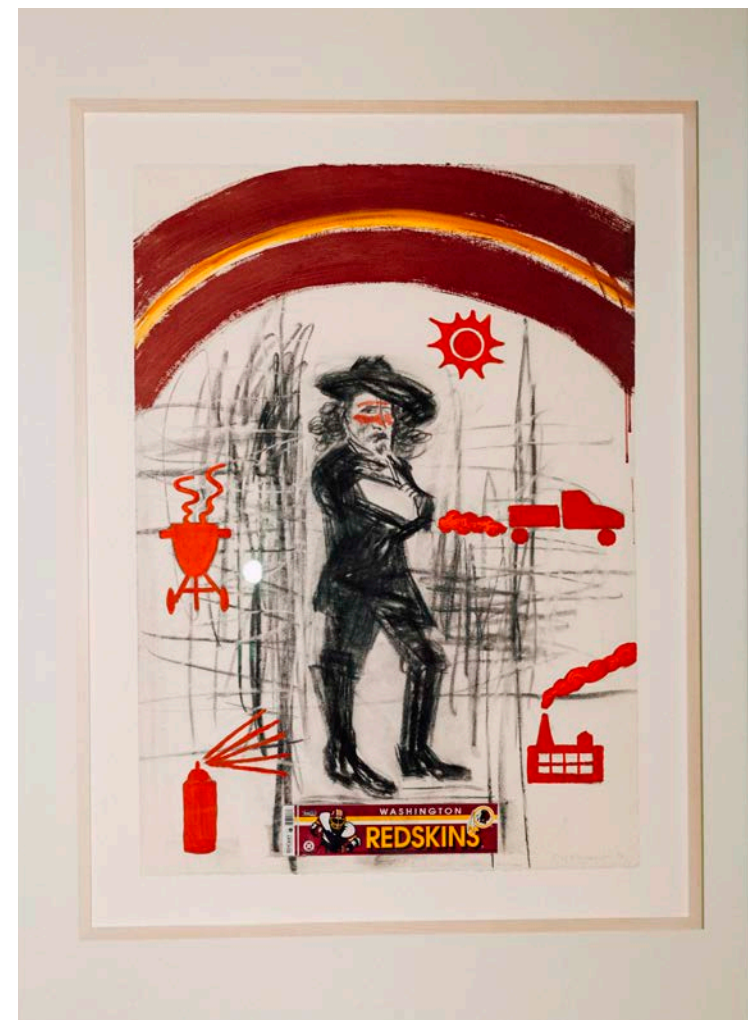
Gochman, a refreshingly frank presence on the art scene, acknowledges that her focus surprises some visitors to her Florida home, a Dutch colonial built in 2017 that was decorated by noted designer Tom Scheerer. Palm Beach is known for its high-end traditionalism, and her collection is anything but.

Gochman happily notes that she has wallpaper by Jeffrey Gibson in what he has called a “trickster” pattern, inspired by the playful disruptor figure featured in some Native folklore and myths. “Having this art in Palm Beach, where it’s a little bit out of place and unexpected, feels like being a bit of a trickster,” she says.

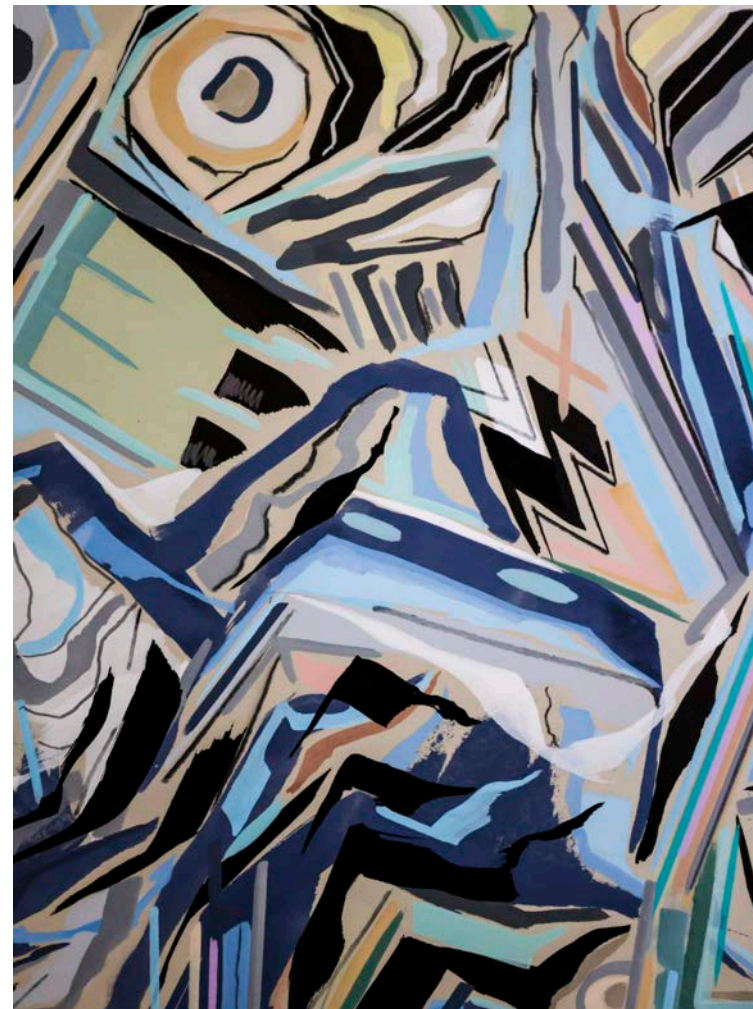
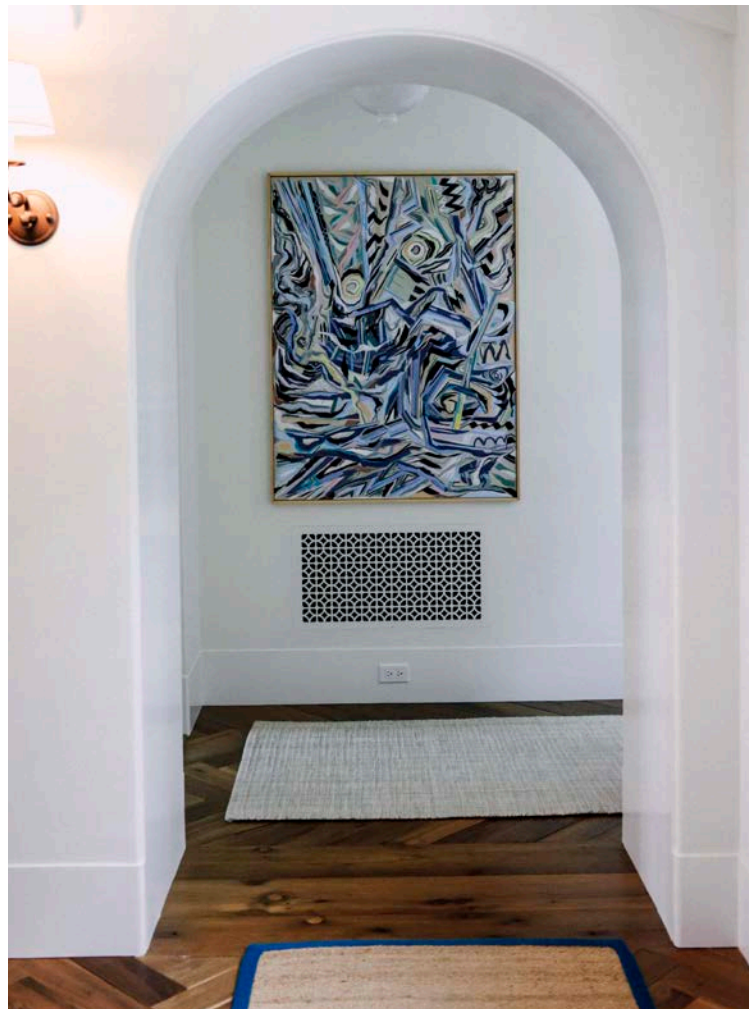
Gochman, who has been involved in Indigenous collecting and philanthropy for about four years, at first did not intend to take on such a specific mission, but as she contemplated the ways she could make a difference in the art world and consulted with Feuer, it became a natural focus. “I’m getting so much out of this,” she says, “and I want to say that to other collectors: It’s been life-changing.”

The collector notes that living with her collection has affected her deeply, and is a far cry from seeing works in a gallery or museum. “I go to sleep thinking about it, I wake up thinking about it, and I wouldn’t have it any other way,” Gochman says. In her collection are works by many well known Indigenous makers, like Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, Kay WalkingStick, and Kent Monkman, as well as the Santa Clara Pueblo ceramicist Rose B. Simpson.

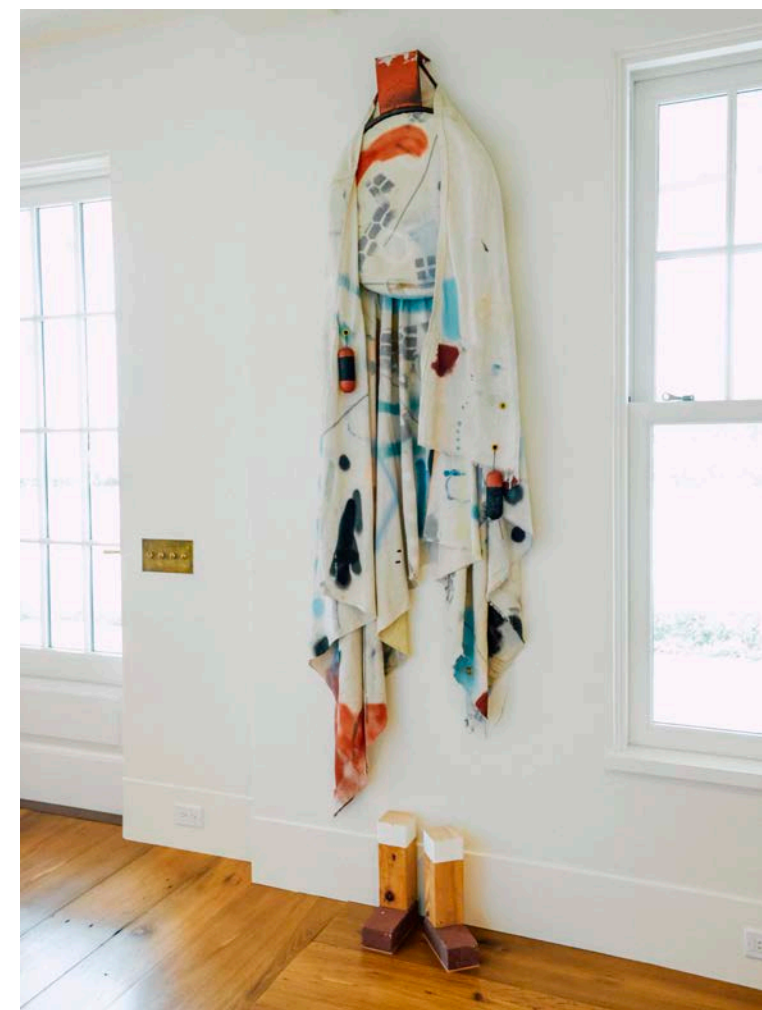
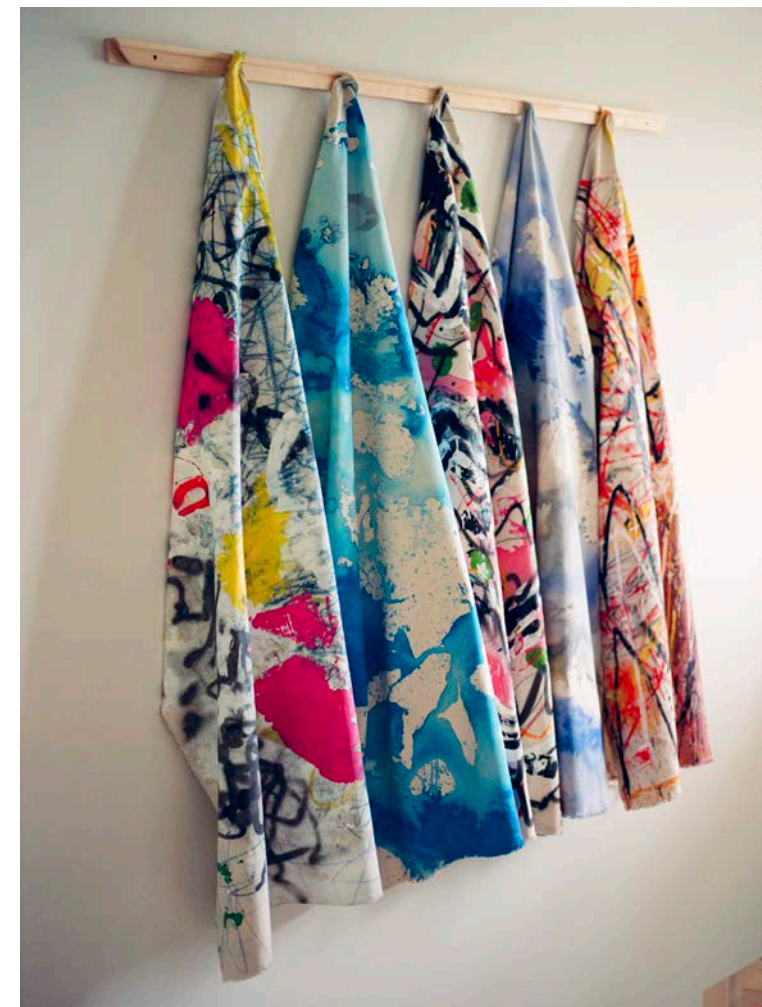
Concurrently, a major show of Simpson’s work will debut this spring at the nearby Norton Museum of Art in West Palm Beach. *Rose B. Simpson: Journeys of Clay* runs at the Norton



ABOVE, FROM TOP: ABOVE THE DESK HANGS "FREE USE AND ENJOYMENT," 2018-2019, BY G. PETER JEMISON, WHILE THREE 2022 SCULPTURES BY SARA SIESTREEM—"THIS CLAM BASKET STOPS PIPELINES," "CHEVY," AND "GHOST II"—SIT ATOP. TO THE RIGHT HANGS "THINGS ARE LOOKING NATIVE, NATIVE'S LOOKING WHITER," 2012, BY NICHOLAS GALANIN; DETAIL OF "HACAH'YOSHA' (LIGHT COLORED HORSE | CADDO)," 2021, BY RAVEN HALFMOON; "CUSTER: REDSKINS," 1993, BY JAUNE QUICK-TO-SEE SMITH. OPPOSITE: "CODA CONSTRUCTION - NOT UNDERSTOOD (REVISITED)," 2021, BY NADIA MYRE.



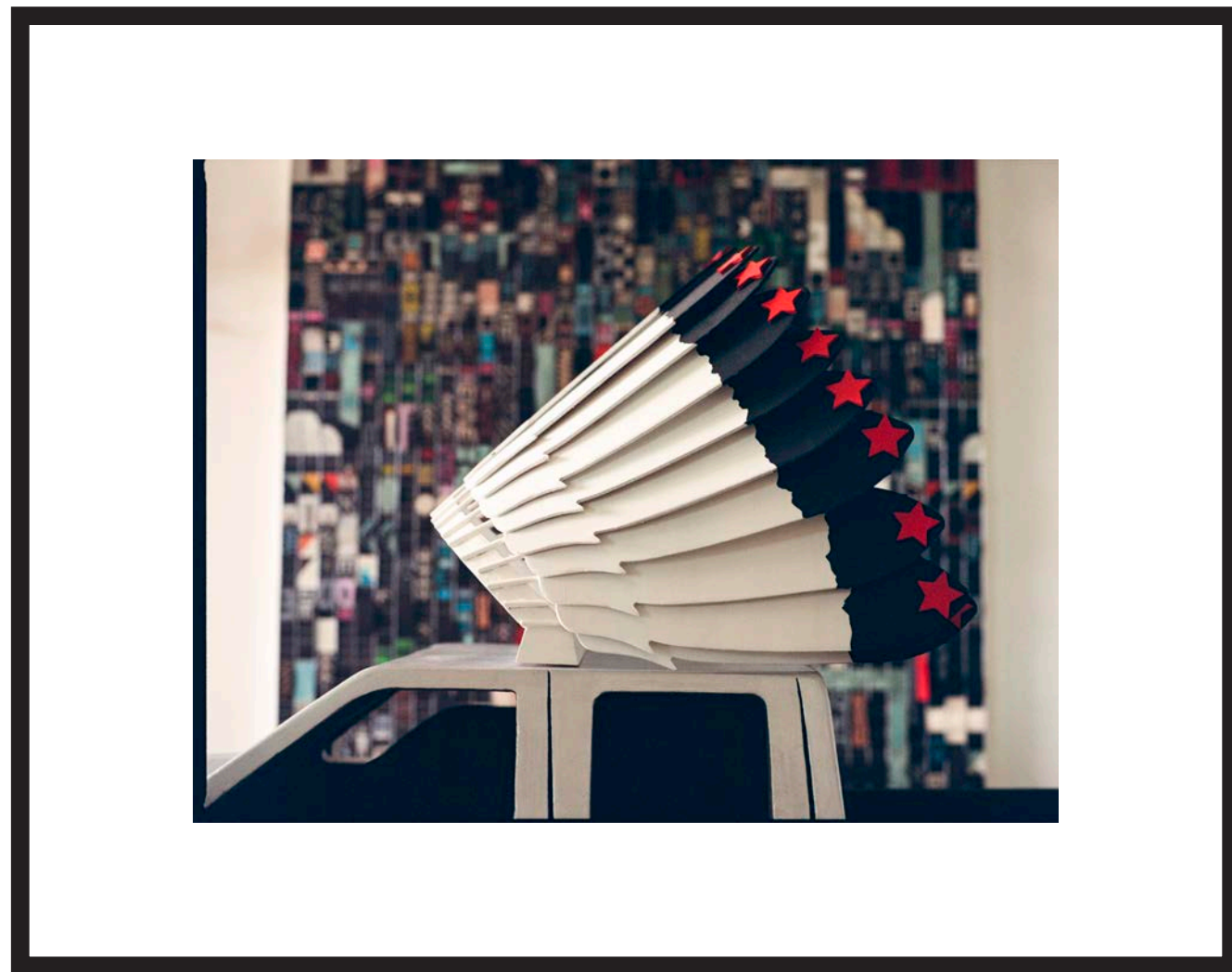
ABOVE, FROM TOP: DETAILS OF "INTERWOVEN (CHEYENNE PINK)," 2022, BY MARIE WATT, AND "SNATCH AND GRAB," 2020, BY MATTHEW KIRK. OPPOSITE: ON THE WALL HANGS "APACHE COUNTRY," CIRCA 2019, BY KAY WALKINGSTICK.



ABOVE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: "WET DREAM CATCHER," 1992, BY JAMES LUNA; "THE DAYS GO BY AND STILL, YOU ARE THERE FOR US," 2023, BY PATRICK DEAN HUBBELL; "OLD MAN HORSE," 2022, BY MATTHEW KIRK; "UNITED WE SHALL OVERCOME," 2022, BY JEFFREY GIBSON. OPPOSITE: ON THE LEFT HANGS "L'ASSOMPTION SASH FOR CARRYING THINGS THAT NO LONGER EXIST #1," 2022, BY ANDREA CARLSON. "IN DEFENSE OF LGBTQ EXISTENCE," 2023, BY VENANCIO ARAGÓN, IS DRAPED OVER THE BED.



JUST PAST THE LEFT DOORWAY HANGS "UNTITLED," 2014, BY SHUVINAI ASHOONA, WHILE "BLUE MOON," 2021, BY HOWARDENA PINDELL, IS VISIBLE ON THE RIGHT. TO THE LEFT OF THE MEDIA CONSOLE ARE TWO 2022 SCULPTURES BY JEAN SHIN: "S.O.S. #9" AND "S.O.S. #13." TO THE RIGHT SITS A SCULPTURE, "MANDAREE," 2022, BY TERESA BAKER. "CAMO COYOTE," 2020, BY DUANE SLICK, HANGS ABOVE. ON THE COFFEE TABLE SITS "URBAN TRICKSTER (ORIGINAL)," 2022, BY JAUNE QUICK-TO-SEE SMITH.



ABOVE: DETAIL OF "NEVER SLIPS (CAUSE IT'S A REAL GOOD ONE)," 2021, BY WENDY RED STAR. BEHIND HANGS "THERE'S A FLOOD STRONGER THAN A CHURCH," 2021, BY MATTHEW KIRK. OPPOSITE: ABOVE THE FIREPLACE, "HOLDING IT TOGETHER II," 2016, BY ROSE B. SIMPSON.

from March 23 to September 1. It's the largest exhibition of her work to date, and her first major survey-style exhibition, featuring 20 sculptures and 10 masks; Gochman has lent to the show from her trove. The Norton's director, Ghislain d'Humières, notes that the show is part of the museum's yearly Recognition of Art by Women (RAW) program, established in 2011. "We're so proud of it," he says. "And we were doing it before it became fashionable around the country."

The Norton show has a matrilineal twist that may well be a first for a major museum presentation: It also features works by Simpson's mother, Roxanne Swentzell, a well-known contemporary maker; Simpson's grandmother, Rina Swentzell; and even her great-grandmother, Rose "Gia" Naranjo. Simpson is descended from generations of potters, and nearly everyone in her family makes art in some capacity.

"I wanted the opportunity to show that I don't exist in a vacuum," says Simpson, 40, who, as she talked on a video call, was hard at work in clay, sculpting a pair of boots that will be part of a future piece. "It shows how much I'm influenced by, and stand by, the foundation of these incredible women."

Her clay figures and masks act as witnesses or guardians. The works frequently have metal jewelry-like earrings or necklaces, and they incorporate twine, found objects, and

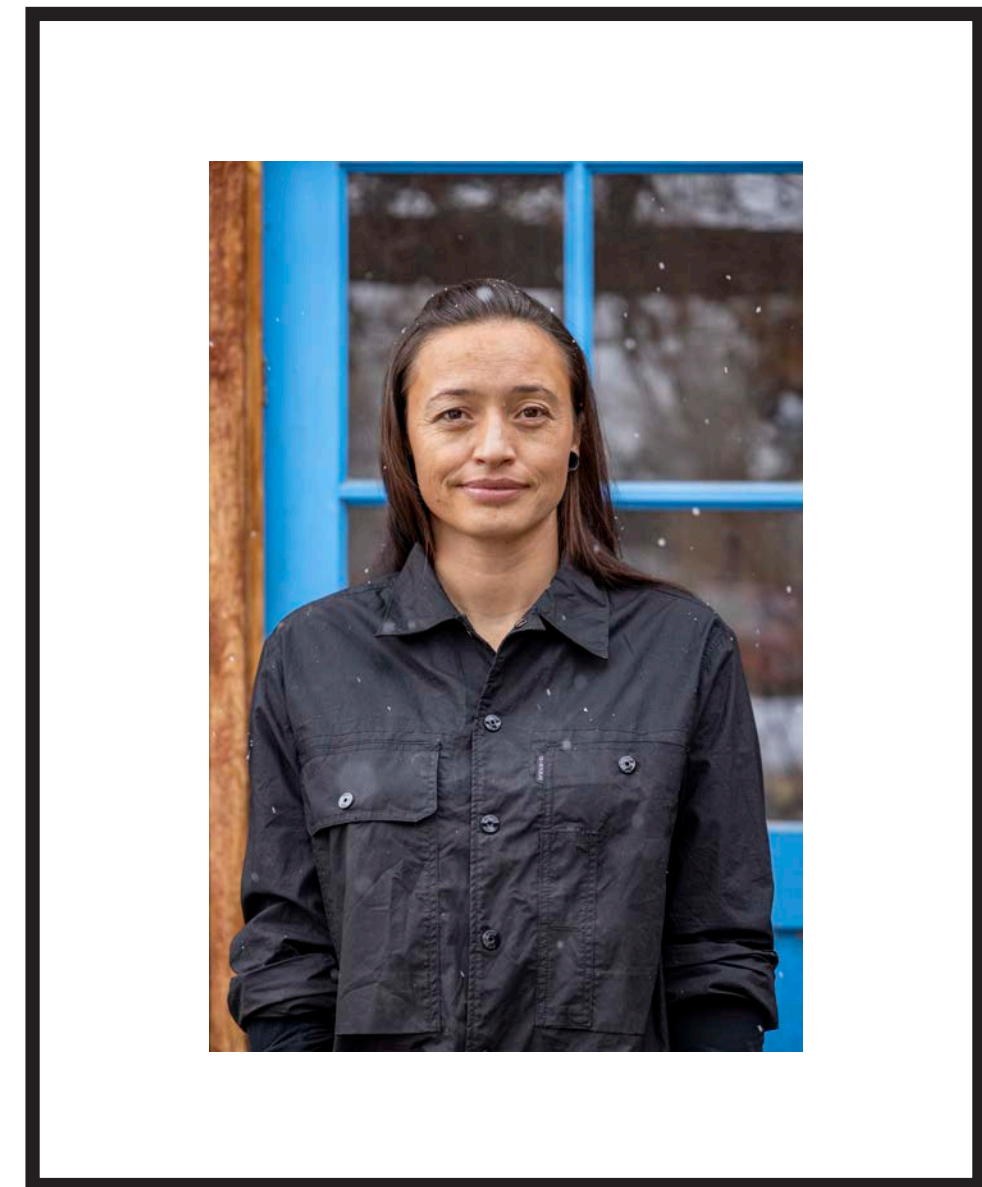
even car parts; "Truss" (2021) in the Norton show features a drum brake (Simpson is a gear-head who works on cars for fun). "It's a note to myself," she says of the piece. "Slow down, take a break, stop. Don't get out of control."

In "Please Hold 1," also at the Norton, the figure has an upturned head, and is draped with a chest piece made of beads. "Chest plates were used by warriors," Simpson says. "I like to transform the warrior from an aggressive stance to something that's intuitive and introspective."

Doing figural work comes naturally to Simpson because of her empathic approach. "I'm constantly trying to understand the human condition," she says. But the fact that the works are not fully realistic, but are highly stylized, is key—it creates a fascinating, uncanny quality. "It's close enough so you can relate, but far enough that it pushes you out of your comfort zone," she says. The resulting tension is electrifying.

It takes Simpson around a month and a half to make a major work in clay, which she fires at high temperatures. She uses what is called the "slap-slab" technique, which involves affixing thin slabs of clay to each other. It creates an appealingly raw, messy surface, and one that stands out. "You can't mistake her work for anyone else's," says White Hawk, a close friend and Minneapolis-based artist.





ABOVE: ROSE B. SIMPSON OUTSIDE HER NEW MEXICO STUDIO.
OPPOSITE: WORKS IN PROGRESS IN SIMPSON'S STUDIO.

Simpson lives on the Santa Clara Pueblo, near Española, New Mexico. She grew up there, and her current house, where she raises her daughter, is close to many family members. She keeps something of a distance from the coastal art world.

For her part, Gochman has gotten to know Simpson a bit. “She’s a powerful woman artist,” says Gochman, who has Simpson’s ceramic and leather “ *Holding It Together II* ” (2016), a mask with a chain hanging from it, in her Palm Beach home. “She not only works in clay, she works in cars and machinery—she’s tough and gentle and motherly, all at the same time.”

The protective side of Simpson’s figures will be highlighted in another upcoming show of her work, a two-part outdoor public project called “ *Seed* ,” commissioned by the Madison Square Park Conservancy, which will go up in Madison Square Park and Inwood Hill Park, both in Manhattan.

Normally, Simpson likes to have the hand of the artist revealed in all her work, but for “ *Seed* ,” the size and material of the figures means that the fabrication had to be largely outsourced. “It’s seven 18-foot sentinels that are surrounding a smaller being embedded in the earth,” she says of the ambitious works, made from steel and cast bronze. “The sentinels are keeping her safe.” Simpson will add some hand-made

adornment so that it doesn’t lose her touch.

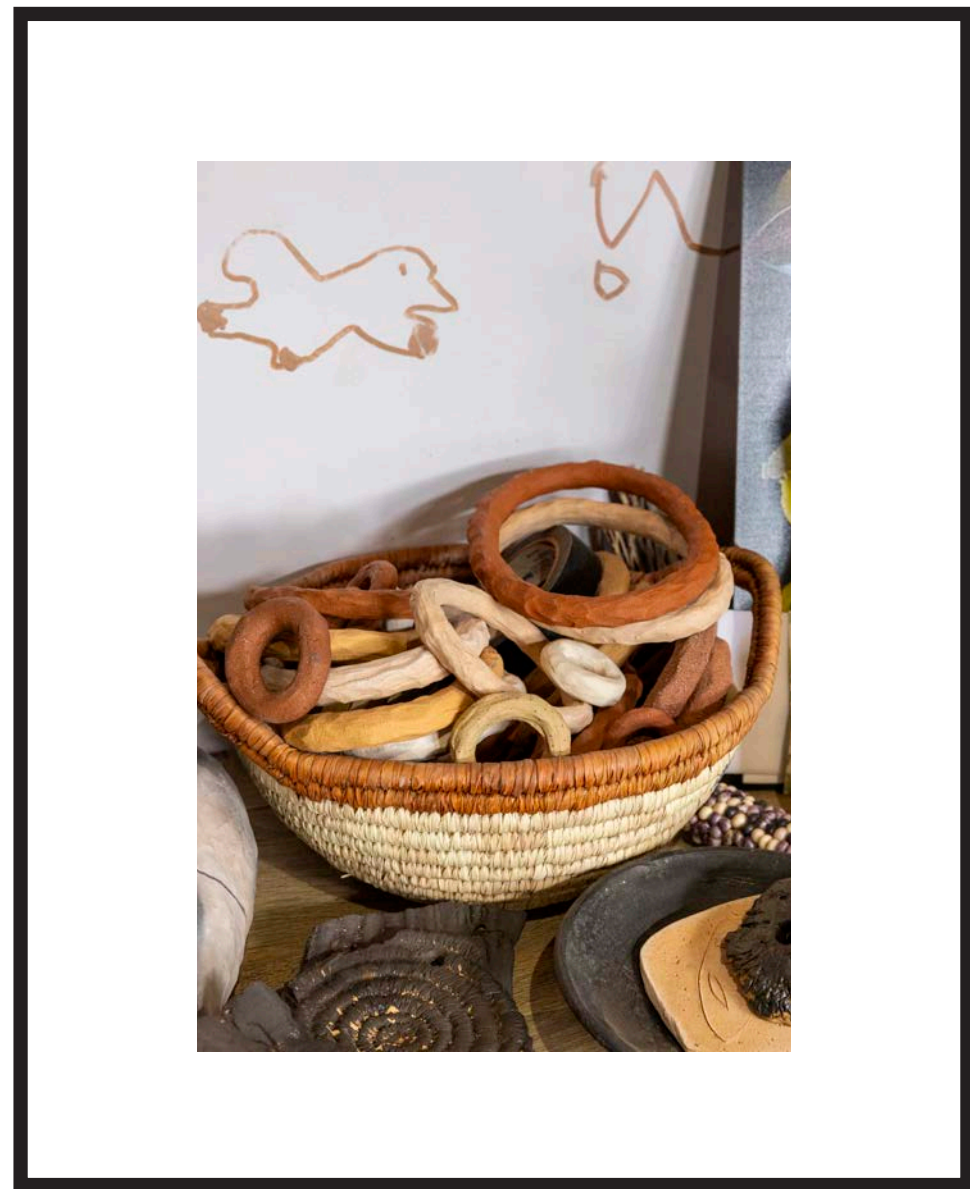
If it seems like Simpson is everywhere these days, it’s true; there was also a recent outdoor installation at the Whitney Museum of American Art, *Rose B. Simpson: Counterculture* . Arden Sherman, the Norton’s senior contemporary curator, marvels at how Simpson has undergone “a meteoric push to popularity” in the last year. “She’s blown up.” Sherman adds that Simpson proves irresistible as a collaborator: “She’s one of the most dynamic people I’ve ever met.”

Simpson thinks she has an idea of why her earthy, soulful work is appealing right now. “Our world is so hyper-digital in so many ways that we crave something else—we crave analog, we crave meaning,” she says. “Humanity itself is needing to be fed by something other than what we’ve had.”

“ *Seed* ” counts as another first for Indigenous artists. “Rose’s work is the first time we’ve commissioned work by a Native American artist, and it’s long overdue,” says Brooke Kamin Rapaport, Madison Square Park Conservancy’s chief curator, who has shown an eye for picking artists whose careers are about to take off.

Of course, indigenous artists themselves note this sense of long-overdue cultural catch-up. “It’s about time,” says White Hawk, the Sicangu Lakota artist who won a MacArthur





ABOVE AND PREVIOUS SPREAD: WORKS IN PROGRESS IN SIMPSON'S STUDIO.
OPPOSITE: SIMPSON AT WORK IN HER STUDIO.

“genius grant” last year for her work that mixes abstract painting with Native American craft.

“People have been fighting this fight for years, and we’re finally seeing progress,” says the artist. “It’s so exciting and I am so grateful to be a part of it. But you can’t help but say: It took way too long.”

She adds that some of the progress is very recent. “When I saw the Jaune Quick-to-See Smith show [*Memory Map*] at the Whitney last year, that was the first time in my life I saw an expansive survey by an Indigenous artist at a mainstream American museum. And I’m 47!” White Hawk’s own ceramic tile work, the wall-sized “Nourish,” will be featured in the Whitney’s 8th floor cafe when it opens this year.

Such a sea change raises tricky issues, as a formerly niche subset of makers quickly enters the mainstream. Do painters and sculptures want to be seen as being part of a special Indigenous category, or merely as contemporary artists, competing on the same field as everyone else for attention and success?

Artists making great work and curators noticing it is only part of the equation, of course. The financial support of collectors is crucial for building careers and getting the works

into circulation. White Hawk, who is fearless about criticizing the art world when necessary, gives the Forge Project a lot of credit in this arena.

Gochman has bought a couple of White Hawk’s works, including a beaded painting. “I am thrilled,” says the artist of Forge. “What they are doing is amazing. They have no bureaucracy. They are nimble and can do a lot in a short time.”

In particular, White Hawk admires how Gochman and Feuer have largely passed the baton of running Forge to the curator Candice Hopkins, who is of Tlingit descent and a citizen of the Carcross/Tagish First Nation. “We were kind of out of a job early on, by design,” says Gochman. “It needed to be Indigenous-led. That’s a real model for institutional change.”

That Forge is looking to the next phase of Indigenous representation—in which Indigenous people are not only making the art that is featured prominently, but also running the show—strikes Ash-Milby as a hopeful sign, despite the false starts of the past.

“I ask myself, *Are we there now?*” she says, taking the long view and sounding guardedly optimistic. “Have we achieved those goals in getting Native art recognized? We sure are ticking a lot of the boxes. It doesn’t feel like a fluke anymore.”