

home • artnews • news

How the Gochman Family Collection Aims to Support Contemporary Indigenous Artists—and Reshape the Mainstream Art World



BY **MAXIMILIANO
DURÓN**



October 25, 2023
5:00am



Collector Becky Gochman (left) with the core team of the Gochman Family Collection, director Zach Feuer (right) and artist-in-residence and co-curator Rachel Martin (center).

WESTON WELLS FOR ARTNEWS

Over the past year or so, the home of collector Becky Gochman and her family has become a locus of sorts for the New York art world. Any given month might see the 12-room apartment host cocktail receptions for nonprofits, tours for museum curators, visits with artists, and maybe even as the setting for a forthcoming artwork.

Located a block from the Guggenheim Museum and boasting views of Central Park, the apartment is filled with work by contemporary Indigenous artists, including a beaded punching bag by Jeffrey Gibson, a multipart installation of a red-painted totem pole that has been broken into pieces by Nicholas Galanin, and paintings by Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, Kay WalkingStick, and George Morrison. Also on view are sculptures by Marie Watt and Cannupa Hanska Luger, woven pieces by Tyrrell Tapaha and Venancio Aragon, drawings by Shuvinai Ashoona,

photographs by Jeremy Dennis, mixed-media works by Teresa Baker and Beau Dick, and the original cutout from James Luna's famed 1991 work *Take a Picture with a Real Indian*.

Assembled in just the past few years, under the leadership of former gallerist Zach Feuer, the

Gochman Family Collection (<https://www.artnews.com/t/gochman-family-collection/>) now

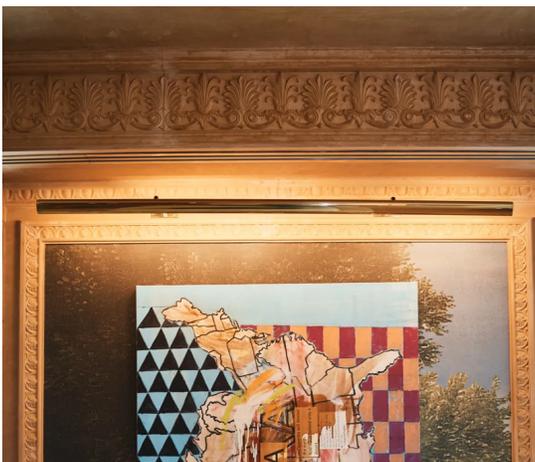
numbers more than 400 works.

"It is already one of the deepest collections of contemporary Native art," said curator Candice Hopkins (Carcross/Tagish First Nation), who serves as one of five curatorial advisers to Gochman and Feuer. "The way that I speak about it is that it's a good thing and also reflective of the fact that collectors and museum curators really haven't been acquiring in the way that they should."

[**Take a video tour of the Gochman Family Collection.** (<https://www.artnews.com/art-news/market/gochman-family-collection-open-house-video-tour-1234683845/>)]

Sitting in her living room one morning this past summer, Gochman described the experience of building the collection as a “wild two-and-a-half years.” She added, on a more serious note, “It was time for this, especially on the East Coast.”

Gochman attributes her journey as a serious art collector to her elder daughter, Sophie, who wrote an opinion column titled “Breaking the Silence Surrounding White Privilege in the Horse World” for the *Chronicle of the Horse*, a leading equestrian magazine. Published in June 2020, a week after the murder of George Floyd, Sophie wrote that her fellow riders had failed “to recognize the vital truth that just because we benefit from a system of oppression does not mean we cannot work to dismantle it.”





Jaune Quick-to-See Smith's *Amerika Map*, 2021, hangs prominently in the Gochman's living room.

WESTON WELLS FOR ARTNEWS

Around the same time, Gochman was thinking about how she could use her family's means to help facilitate change in the world while looking for causes through a social justice lens. The column and its ensuing reactions—from horse trainers saying “there is no problem in our sport” to people agreeing with its urgent call for change—propelled Gochman's plans. “I wanted to move fast,” she said, “while still doing things the right way.”

Gochman no longer possesses many of her earliest acquisitions, not because she flipped them on the secondary market but because she donated them to establish the permanent collection of **Forge Project**

(<https://www.artnews.com/t/forge-project/>), an initiative that Gochman founded in 2021

with Feuer to support Indigenous artists. Gochman and Feuer quickly came to realize that, in order for Forge Project—located in the Hudson Valley in New York on unceded ancestral homelands of the Moh-He-Con-Nuck (today known as the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians)—to have real impact, they would need to step back and have an Indigenous leader helm the organization.

“We kept thinking about the land we were on and keeping the land with a voice. It became apparent that we could do a complete Indigenous-led program,” Gochman said. When Hopkins first visited Forge Project, Gochman said, “we discussed if change was a possibility and if this initiative could bring about that change. She thought absolutely it could.” Feuer added that his partner in the project “saw early on that without changing who’s in charge, it doesn’t matter.”

Hopkins, one of today’s most closely watched curators whose work has helped increase visibility for contemporary Indigenous

artists, soon agreed to lead Forge Project as executive director and chief curator. “I was intrigued by the invitation to shape it in the way that we wanted, and that included the collection,” she said. “The ability to support contemporary Native art at this level historically hasn’t been there. Becky and Zach had complete faith in and a need for understanding how Native leadership can equal self-determination.”

After giving her earliest acquisitions to Forge Project, and having caught the collecting bug in full, Gochman wanted to keep going: she decided to establish the Gochman Family Collection with aims similar to those of Forge Project, which today operates as an independent, Native-led organization.



Artist-in-residence Rachel Martin works atop a ping pong table in front of the murals she created for the Gochman family residence.

WESTON WELLS FOR ARTNEWS

The first work to enter the newly established Gochman Family Collection was a commission by Rachel Martin (Tlingit/Tsaagweidei, Killer Whale Clan, of the Yellow Cedar House [Xaai Hit'] Eagle Moiety), who met Gochman and Feuer when they were starting to build the Forge Project collection. In shallow alcoves along one wall in Gochman's game room, Martin created a family portrait in chalk, with their daughters Sophie and Mimi flanked by Becky and her husband, David. The daughters, representing the family's next generation, are depicted as young eagles, while David is shown as a paternal-masculine figure and Becky as a maternal-feminine figure. "Tlingit culture places great importance on concepts of

family and place and home, so I was very intentional with the relationship these figures hold in this space,” Martin said.

“These boards are stronger together as a group and family, which I think serves as a beautiful concept for both the commission and the structure of the collection.”

Gochman said that, in a way, this work has served as a “catalyst to bring about what other things would happen here,” and that the work made the apartment “come alive.” Nearby is a record player and a collection of vinyl LPs selected by artist Ginger Dunnill, who produces the podcast *Broken Boxes* with her husband Cannupa Hanska Luger. The choice of recording artists ranges from Indigenous musicians Black Belt Eagle Scout and Buddy Red Bow to the Ramones and Jay-Z.





From left, Kimberly Fulton Orozco's *Insecure Mixtape.Romance Story.1. Saving My Love for You* (2023) and Rachel Martin's *I'm Gonna Go Where the Luv Is It Is What It Is* (2022).

WESTON WELLS FOR ARTNEWS

In the same room is another family portrait by Martin, a drawing of three heads overlapping—indicative of the three women in the family—as well as a towering sculpture by Marie Watt comprising a cedar base, brightly colored reclaimed wool blankets, and a steel I-beam. There's also a ping-pong table, which doubles as a workspace. Martin, who soon after her commission joined the Gochman Family Collection as a curatorial adviser and artist-in-residence, often works from here.

“Being surrounded by all of that work is incredibly inspirational on so many levels,” Martin said. “Seeing the work around me, I’m inspired to push my art further than I probably would if I was

just away and separate. The concept of much of the work in the collection is how strong it is together.”

The arrangement of works in the apartment this past summer was relatively new because many of the pieces previously installed were out on loan to “Indian Theater: Native Performance, Art, and Self-Determination since 1969,” an exhibition that Hopkins curated for CCS Bard’s Hessel Museum of Art, and to solo exhibitions for Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, Raven Halfmoon, and Jeffrey Gibson. The Gochman Family Collection aims to be a lending entity, to share the art with as many people as possible.

The entire collection is accessible online, and the organization charges no loan fees, so as to “reduce barriers to access,” as Hopkins put it. (The collection also holds work by non-Native artists, including Alice Neel, Tau Lewis, Stanley Whitney, and Howardena Pindell.)

Each year, around one-fifth of the collection is loaned out to major museums, cultural

centers, and biennials. “I think 20 percent is pretty good, all things considered, but I think we could even work harder on that,” Gochman said, noting that a future goal is to open a publicly accessible space to show more work from the collection.

Martin agreed. “A lot of times a collector buys the work and then that’s it: this person owns it and that person doesn’t,” she said. “That’s definitely not the direction that this collection goes. It’s focused on institutional change—how do we make collecting art actionable?”



Atop the pool table, Gochman displays a variety of wearable artworks by Sherri Dick, Elias Jade Not Afraid, and Veronica Poblano.

WESTON WELLS

One aspect of the Gochman Family Collection that distinguishes it from many others focused on Indigenous and Native American art, Hopkins said, is that it does

not include any cultural belongings, or what many might call artifacts. “Many of our cultural belongings have become trafficable objects,” Hopkins said. “How do you call attention to that? How do you empower the work that Native artists are making now, so that funds go toward them and their work instead of the hands of private collectors?”

One way to go about that, which Hopkins said she sees reflected in the Gochman Family Collection, is through “a deep sense of self-reflection” in the midst of “thinking about how a private collection can be part of a public good and how collections can be places of custodianship and care, while also being deeply in dialogue with artists and their values.”

To that end, the Gochman Family Collection has deaccessioned works on occasion, by donating them to Forge Project. “A few of the pieces we’ve bought don’t feel right in our collection,” Gochman said. One recent example is Nicholas Galanin’s *Indian Children’s Bracelet* (2014–18), a found set of child-size handcuffs that had been

worn by Indigenous schoolchildren onto which Galanin engraved Tlingit iconography. “I thought it was such a powerful piece,” Gochman said. “But when it was being sent to us, I realized that the work was too personal for our collection.”



Juxtaposed works of different scales include Jaune Quick-to-See Smith's 2021 untitled sculpture of a coyote's head on the coffee table, and standing guard by the window is Cannupa Hanska Luger's *Midéegaadi: Fire Bison*, 2022.

WESTON WELLS FOR ARTNEWS

Hopkins agreed that a work like that is better suited to being under Native stewardship, particularly because in the United States,

there is still a “thickness of historical amnesia. A lot of folks don’t understand how the histories of boarding schools weren’t just assimilative, they were also genocidal and deeply violent. We can’t shy away from it. It’s a matter of fact.”

Gochman said she hopes to engender real institutional change in the art world by calling attention to how mainstream museums continue to be slow in supporting the careers of Indigenous artists and acquiring their work. She hopes the collection can serve as a “model for others down the road, who want to do things the right way but are unsure where to begin.”

She continued, “I am coming at this with a fresh set of eyes. I’m not afraid to speak to museum directors and tell them a land acknowledgment is not enough.” Instead, museums need “to listen to what the artists are saying about what they need and to listen to more of the community.”

On the philanthropic side, the Gochmans donated \$25 million

to Bard College, matched by George Soros, to create an endowment. As part of the gift, Bard renamed its American Studies Program the American and Indigenous Studies Program, committing as well to recruit Indigenous scholars for faculty positions and establish scholarships for undergrad and graduate students from Indigenous communities.

There's still much to be done, despite the increased visibility that Indigenous artists have achieved in the past five years, from solo exhibitions at mainstream museums and permanent-collection acquisitions to Jeffrey Gibson's recent commission for the US Pavilion at next year's Venice Biennale. Having created a template for other collectors, Martin said, Gochman has proved that a lot can get done quickly, just as it has with the Gochman Family Collection: "The idea of this happening, not with just one person doing it but a multitude of people—how much of an impact that can make on an entire market—is incredible."



A detail of Rachel Martin's commissioned work *Gochman Family Chalk Drawings*, 2022, the first piece to enter the Gochman Family Collection.

WESTON WELLS FOR ARTNEWS

Hopkins pointed out that the last time the Museum of Modern Art presented a major group exhibition focused on Indigenous artists was “Indian Art of the United States” — all the way back in 1941. “The exhibition was making the case that Native art is foundational to the development of modern art,” she said, “but somehow that narrative got lost.”

Keeping that history alive and thriving is a priority for Gochman, now and for the future. “We have no intention of selling our pieces—it’s not about that for us,” she said. “This is not about commodity. It’s everything opposite of that.”

A version of this article appears in the 2023 *ARTnews* Top 200