

PRESS RELEASE

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JEFFREY GIBSON: LIKE A HAMMER OPENS AT SEATTLE ART MUSEUM FEBRUARY 28

Major exhibition of acclaimed contemporary artist who draws on diverse influences including abstraction, Indigenous art, queer aesthetics, and pop culture



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SEATTLE, WA - The Seattle Art Museum presents *Jeffrey Gibson: Like a Hammer* (February 28-May 12, 2019), a major survey of works from 2011 to the present that reflects the artist's deepening exploration of his Indigenous heritage, legacies of abstraction, and popular and alternative cultures. Organized by the Denver Art Museum, the exhibition features over 65 works produced during a pivotal time in the Gibson's career, including abstract geometric paintings on rawhide and canvas, beaded punching bags, sculptures, wall hangings, and video. Reflecting the complexity of modern identity, Gibson's work envisions a more inclusive future.

A contemporary artist of Cherokee heritage and a citizen of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, Gibson grew up in the US and urban centers in Europe and South Korea. As a young adult, he was involved in queer club culture and interested in popular music, fashion, and design. These experiences inform his vision of exuberant hybridity, in which glass beads, metal jingles, ribbons, song lyrics, and abstract geometric patterns come together. Gibson's use of materials and references that resonate in modern and contemporary Western art, as well as Indigenous and ancient cultures, establishes a unique visual vocabulary that gives rise to new possibilities and points of connection.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

A highlight of the exhibition is 15 punching bags, most of which are from the *Everlast* series that marked an artistic breakthrough for Gibson. Intricately adorned in beads, fringe, and jingles, and often incorporating text, the punching bags shift gender associations between the masculine and the feminine. They also prompt reflection about the history of violence against Indigenous cultures and signal a call for resilience and perseverance. *Like a Hammer* also features *IF*



I RULED THE WORLD (2018), which was recently acquired by the Seattle Art Museum for its permanent collection.

Language plays an important role in Gibson's work, with lines from pop songs and other sources adorning vibrant woven and patterned wall hangings and punching bags. Taken from such diverse sources as James Baldwin, Pete Seeger, Culture Club, and Public Enemy, among others, the phrases take on multiple meanings and speak to resistance, reclamation, and celebration.

Like a Hammer features many of Gibson's abstract geometric paintings on canvas and rawhide, in which he explores pattern, light, and color, prompting the viewer to see abstraction through the lens of Indigeneity. Also on view are midsize and large figurative sculptures. The colorful "club kid" figures are inspired by his experiences in the queer club scenes of South Korea, London, and New York in the 1980s and '90s and connect to his interest in performance, theatricality, and communal experiences. By contrast, his "ancestor" figures are draped with elaborately ornamented cloaks and topped with clay heads reminiscent of skulls or ancient Mississippian culture effigy heads. While visually fierce, these works are seen by the artist as teachers and culture-bearers.

One gallery is dedicated to the West Coast debut of *DON'T MAKE ME OVER*, a multimedia installation consisting of cascades of diaphanous rainbow-colored curtains embedded with lyrics from Burt Bacharach's 1962 song about love and acceptance, made legendary by Dionne Warwick. The curtains encircle an oversized garment adorned with bells and jingles, and a nearby projection plays a video of Gibson wearing the garment, chanting and drumming as he moves within the enclosed curtained space. A series of irregularly shaped diptych paintings on rawhide complete this installation.

At the end of the exhibition is a reading room, where visitors can reflect and read books—including selections for children and young adults—related to the topics explored in Gibson's work, such as history, politics, culture, and music.

"Jeffrey Gibson's art is fearless yet playful. His wide-ranging mind transforms myriad influences into provocative work that defies categorization," says Barbara Brotherton, Curator of Native American Art. "With Gibson, more is more," adds Catharina Manchanda, Jon & Mary Shirley Curator of Modern & Contemporary Art. "His work is visually and conceptually exhilarating, full of nuance and complexity. Be prepared for a mind-altering experience."

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

A 144-page exhibition catalogue (including 106 color illustrations) published by Denver Art Museum and Prestel will be available for purchase in SAM Shop (\$39.95). Also titled *Jeffrey Gibson: Like a Hammer* (ISBN: 978-3-7913-5733-1), it presents six essays on themes found in the artist's work by Glenn Adamson, Roy Boney Jr., Anne Ellegood, America Meredith, Sara Raza, and John P. Lukavic, the Andrew W. Mellon Curator of Native Arts at the Denver Art Museum, who curated the exhibition and also edited the catalogue. *Like a Hammer* also features an interview with the artist by Jen Mergel.

RELATED PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

In conjunction with the exhibition, SAM will present a dynamic lineup of programming, including Art Beyond Sight and docent tours, programs for schools and educators, and a series of public programs. The programs will focus on the intersectionality and materiality of Gibson's artistic practice and connect with regional youth, especially LGBTQ and urban Native youth. A free community opening on February 28 will include a talk by the artist. Other highlights include a fashion show spotlighting Indigenous designers and Legendary Children, the Seattle Public Library/SAM partner event celebrating QTPOC (queer and trans people of color) artists.

TICKETING INFO

Museum Hours

- Closed Monday and Tuesday
- Wednesday 10 am–5 pm
- Thursdays 10 am–9 pm
- Friday-Sunday 10 am–5 pm

Daily Prices

- \$24.95 Adult
- \$22.95 Senior (62+), Military (with ID)
- \$14.95 Student (with ID), Teen (13–17)
- FREE for children (12 and under)
- FREE for SAM Members

First Thursday Reduced Ticket Prices

Special Exhibition ticket prices are reduced by more than 50% on the first Thursday of the month. Tickets to SAM Collections and Installations are free.

Head to visitsam.org/gibson for the most up-to-date ticketing information.

EXHIBITION ORGANIZATION AND SUPPORT

Jeffrey Gibson: Like a Hammer is organized by the Denver Art Museum.

The exhibition premiered at the Denver Art Museum (May 13, 2018–August 12, 2018) and then traveled to the Mississippi Museum of Art (September 8, 2018–January 20, 2019). After SAM, it heads to the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art (June 7–September 14, 2019).

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ABOUT SEATTLE ART MUSEUM

As the leading visual art institution in the Pacific Northwest, SAM draws on its global collections, powerful exhibitions, and dynamic programs to provide unique educational resources benefiting the Seattle region, the Pacific Northwest, and beyond. SAM was founded in 1933 with a focus on Asian art. By the late 1980s the museum had outgrown its original home, and in 1991 a new 155,000-square-foot downtown building, designed by Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates, opened to the public. The 1933 building was renovated and reopened as the Asian Art Museum in 1994. SAM's desire to further serve its community was realized in 2007 with the opening of two stunning new facilities: the nine-acre Olympic Sculpture Park (designed by Weiss/Manfredi Architects)—a “museum without walls,” free and open to all—and the Allied Works Architecture designed 118,000-square-foot expansion of its main, downtown location, including 232,000 square feet of additional space built for future expansion. The Olympic Sculpture Park and SAM's downtown expansion celebrated their tenth anniversary in 2017.

From a strong foundation of Asian art to noteworthy collections of African and Oceanic art, Northwest Coast Native American art, European and American art, and modern and contemporary art, the strength of SAM's collection of approximately 25,000 objects lies in its diversity of media, cultures, and time periods.