



PAVILION OF THE UNITED STATES

60TH INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION – LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA

the space in which to place me

Jeffrey Gibson

Presented by Portland Art Museum, Oregon, and SITE Santa Fe, New Mexico

Commissioners: Louis Grachos, Executive Director, SITE Santa Fe; Kathleen Ash-Milby, Curator of Native American Art, Portland Art Museum; Abigail Winograd, Independent Curator

Curators: Kathleen Ash-Milby, Abigail Winograd

ON VIEW:

United States Pavilion, Giardini della Biennale, Venice, Italy

APRIL 20 – NOVEMBER 24, 2024

Vaporetto Stops: Giardini 1, 2, 8, 4.1, 4.2, 5.1, 5.2, 6.1, 6.2

Summer Opening Hours: 11 a.m. - 7 p.m. (April 20 to September 30 - last admission 6:45 p.m.)

Fall Opening Hours: 10 a.m. - 6 p.m. (October 1 to November 24 - last admission 5:45 p.m.)

Closed on Mondays (except April 22; June 17; July 2, 22; September 30; November 18)

PRE-OPENING

APRIL 17 - 19, 2024, 10:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.

United States Pavilion, Giardini della Biennale

PRESS CONFERENCE AND INAUGURATION

THURSDAY, APRIL 18, 2024, 11:15 a.m.

With a performance by the Colorado Inter-Tribal Dancers and the Oklahoma Fancy Dancers

United States Pavilion, Giardini della Biennale

Portland, OR and Santa Fe, NM – April 17, 2024 – The United States Pavilion at the 60th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia presents a multidisciplinary exhibition by **Jeffrey Gibson**, an artist recognized for a hybrid visual language that employs abundant color, complex pattern, and text to articulate the confluence of American, Indigenous, and Queer histories and imagine new futures. Gibson's exhibition for the U.S. Pavilion, *the space in which to place me*, engages concepts that have shaped the artist's practice over his 20-year career. Bringing together sculpture, multimedia paintings, paintings on paper, and video, the exhibition explores the dimensions of collective and individual identity and the forces that shape its perception across time.

The 2024 U.S. Pavilion is presented by **Portland Art Museum in Oregon** and **SITE Santa Fe in New Mexico**,

in cooperation with the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The Pavilion is commissioned by **Kathleen Ash-Milby**, Curator of Native American Art at the Portland Art Museum and a member of the Navajo Nation; **Louis Grachos**, Phillips Executive Director of SITE Santa Fe; and **Abigail Winograd**, independent curator. The exhibition is curated by Winograd and Ash-Milby, who is the first Native curator to organize a U.S. Pavilion. Gibson joins an esteemed group of contemporary artists who have represented the United States on the Biennale Arte's global stage and, as a member of the Mississippi band of Choctaw Indians and of Cherokee descent, he is the first Indigenous artist to represent the country with a solo exhibition.

the space in which to place me considers Indigenous histories within an American and international context, expanding upon the varied materials and forms that Gibson has employed over the past two decades. The title references Oglala Lakota poet Layli Long Soldier's *Ħe Sápa*, a poem whose geometric shape parallels Gibson's meditation on the physicality of belonging. Gibson often draws influence from poetry and literature, as well as music, fashion, and theory, which materialize in his intuitive use of text. This long-held engagement continues throughout *the space in which to place me*. Gibson incorporates language from foundational American documents from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including constitutional amendments, legislation, speeches, and official correspondence, as well as song lyrics and musical references. Often pointing toward moments in history that were meant to spark change, Gibson's use of text encourages viewers to examine our past when considering the present.

"This exhibition extends the timeline of Indigenous histories," said Ash-Milby. "Jeffrey combines ancient aesthetic and material modalities with early 19th and 20th century Native practices to propose an Indigenous future of our own determination. I'm honored to be a part of this historic project, and I especially look forward to seeing how Native communities and students engage with the work as a tool for innovation and healing."

"Few artists working today are so expert in engaging our hearts and our collective conscience. Operating within and beyond the constructs of the contemporary canon, Jeffrey proposes alternate worlds that embrace our shared humanity and create space for joy while acknowledging hardship," said Winograd. "I'm so proud to bring Jeffrey's worldview to the Venice Biennale, where he activates the U.S. Pavilion in a manner truly unlike anything that's come before it."

"It's been a privilege to witness how this exhibition has come together over many months and across multiple states. Seeing the murals, which were created in Santa Fe, installed in Venice is a particularly resonant moment that encapsulates, for me, the collaborative experience of this project," said Grachos. "Helping to realize Jeffrey's vision for this monumental exhibition has been a great joy, and it's the kind of work that is core to SITE Santa Fe's mission of supporting artistic innovation."

"This exhibition will introduce an international audience to Jeffrey's powerful work for the first time, and, in turn, to the complex histories of our country and of Native people," said Brian Ferriso, Director of the Portland Art Museum. "We are grateful to be a part of such a significant global moment, and to help provide opportunities for access and education that are so essential to Jeffrey's work and the values of the Portland Art Museum."

In conjunction with the presentation at the U.S. Pavilion, Gibson and the commissioning institutions are collaborating with two educational partners, the **Institute of American Indian Arts** (Santa Fe, NM) and **Bard College** (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY) to realize programming that connects Indigenous, Native American, and international undergraduate humanities students, graduate art students, and the public.

ABOUT *the space in which to place me*

For the U.S. Pavilion, Gibson has created an exhibition of new and recent work that invites viewers to examine collective history and its capacity to prescribe a societal center and periphery. With *the space in which to place me*, Gibson reorients this established framework and creates a new nexus that makes room for generations of marginalized voices.

The exhibition begins in the pavilion's forecourt with the titular work: a large-scale, site-specific sculpture that combines a series of classical bases in a multi-level platform painted in a singular, vibrant red. Encouraging public interaction, the installation offers a site for celebration, respite, and gathering. On opening day, a dance program featuring members of the Colorado Inter-Tribal Dancers and Oklahoma Fancy Dancers will inaugurate the space.

Beyond the forecourt, Gibson wraps the neoclassical building in hand-painted murals that explode with his signature expression of color, pattern, and text. Extending across the eastern and western facades of the building are two introductory phrases: the title of the exhibition on the left is joined on the right by "We hold these truths to be self-evident," an opening line from the United States' Declaration of Independence, which precludes Gibson's integration of foundational American documents throughout the exhibition.

Surrounding the exterior facade is a series of eight flags, each mounted on twenty-foot-tall teepee poles and patterned in their own unique design. Flags have been a part of Gibson's practice since 2012 when he first constructed them from recycled army blankets and painted directly on the wool. Often a marker of territory or a signal of affiliation, here Gibson's vibrant, geometric flags represent inclusivity, welcoming visitors to a space that acknowledges collective memory alongside individual experience.

Entering the pavilion's first gallery, visitors encounter two towering figures, *The Enforcer* (2024) and *WE WANT TO BE FREE* (2024). Standing approximately 10 feet high, the figures take their shape from beads, ribbon, fringe, and tin jingles—elements inspired by traditional Native regalia. Their heads, rendered imperfect and asymmetrical in glazed ceramic, reference Mississippian effigy pots, an ancient tradition from the American Southeast. Their bodies bear beaded text on each side: *The Enforcer's* chest refers to the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to the U.S. Constitution, known as the "Reconstruction Amendments," which abolished slavery and intended to protect the civil rights of Black American citizens. Also referenced is the Enforcement Act of 1870, which established penalties for interfering with a person's right to vote. *WE WANT TO BE FREE* is emblazoned on the front of the adjoining figure, whose additional text refers to the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, a law granting basic rights to Indigenous people within U.S. boundaries, and the Civil Rights Act of 1866, the first federal law to define citizenship and claim all citizens equal under the law. On a mural behind the figures are the words of Martin Luther King Jr.: "We are made by history," a phrase employed by King in 1954 to urge his congregation to take an active role in their futures, and one that Gibson borrows here to emphasize how our reality is shaped by our past.

Gibson continues to approach these ideas in the next gallery, where two beaded bird sculptures, *we are the witnesses* (2024) and *If there is no struggle there is no progress* (2024), perch atop stone pedestals. A consistent motif in Gibson's practice, the birds are inspired in part by "whimsies," Victorian era Native-made objects, which were originally created to appeal to the taste and aesthetics of the period. Once viewed as kitsch, the objects fell outside of culturally specific definitions, which is what drew Gibson to them initially. More than just a source of inspiration, Native-made objects are integrated in the paintings

on paper on view in the second and fourth galleries. Gibson sourced examples of traditional Native beadwork, which includes bags, belts, and medallions from websites and estate and garage sales. Applying them first to a felt base and then to painted cotton rag paper, the objects are attached to the surface of the paintings with care and kept intact in their original form. This method of construction allows the objects, whose makers are unknown, to be easily removed if a viewer is able to identify the object and maker. In the event that an object is claimed, Gibson has committed to returning the work and commissioning an Indigenous artist to create a replacement or to make one in his studio. The objects introduce a physical dimension to the kaleidoscopic works on paper, as seen in *ACTION NOW ACTION IS ELOQUENCE* (2024), which incorporates a vintage beaded belt that still holds the curved shape of its original wearer.

Gibson has swathed the walls of the rotunda in a deep red, reimagining the space as the beating heart of the exhibition. At the center hangs one of the artist's iconic punching bags, created specifically for the U.S. Pavilion. Titled *WE HOLD THESE TRUTHS TO BE SELF-EVIDENT* (2024), the bag's multi-colored fringe cascades in diagonal layers to the floor below. The beaded bag is precisely lit, while the rest of the room remains dim, creating a space for respite and reflection at the midpoint of the exhibition.

In the next gallery, Gibson's enduring exploration of hybridity takes a new form with *I'M A NATURAL MAN* (2024), *Be Some Body* (2024), and *Treat Me Right* (2024) three busts elevated to eye level on marble bases. Like many of Gibson's figures, they are intentionally indeterminate; their beaded skin and intricate hair cannot be ascribed to any one specific culture or aesthetic. The busts also blur the boundaries between historical eras—integrated among the swirling beads are vintage pinback buttons with the language of advocacy groups and organizers, such as the slogan "If we settle for what they're giving us, we deserve what we get!". Surrounding the busts are related works on paper and large-scale paintings, including *THE RETURNED MALE STUDENT FAR TOO FREQUENTLY GOES BACK TO THE RESERVATION AND FALLS INTO THE OLD CUSTOM OF LETTING HIS HAIR GROW LONG* (2024). The work's title and its matching text draw from a 1902 letter from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Superintendent of the school district of Round Valley, California, in which a directive is given for male Indians to cut their hair to "hasten their progress towards civilization." Positioned in front of these words are the three busts whose ribbon and beaded hair falls long past their faces, a refusal rendered in defiant, electric color.

In the final gallery of the exhibition, Gibson immerses viewers in a multi-channel video installation, *She Never Dances Alone* (2020), a work originally shown in New York's Times Square. In the U.S. Pavilion, the video is projected simultaneously across nine screens and features artist and dancer Sarah Ortegon HighWalking (enrolled Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho) performing the Jingle Dress Dance, a powwow dance that originated with the Ojibwe tribe. The centuries-old dance is traditionally performed by women to call upon ancestors for strength, protection, and healing. Dancing to the beats of First Nations electronic group The Halluci Nation, Ortegon HighWalking performs in a series of her own dresses adorned with jingles or rows of *ziibaaska'iganan* (metal cones). As the dance progresses, her image multiplies within each screen and across the gallery, representing generations of Indigenous women and acknowledging their persistence for years to come. Inviting viewers to imagine a response to the dance's ancestral call, Gibson gestures toward a future that can be shaped by acceptance and healing.

For more information on the 2024 U.S. Pavilion, please visit: www.jeffreygibsonvenice2024.org

Explore a series of audio insights from the pavilion curators, 24 extended wall texts, information on public and educational programs, an interactive map of the exhibition, and more on Bloomberg Connects, the official app for the Biennale Arte 2024, free for download here:

www.bloombergconnects.org/

ABOUT THE PROGRAMMING

In conjunction with the presentation at the U.S. Pavilion, the **Institute of American Indian Arts** (Santa Fe, NM) will organize the Venice Indigenous Arts School, a series of public programs in Venice, June 10-14, 2024. The week-long program will be conducted by the IAIA MFA in Studio Arts Program, under the direction of Dr. Mario A. Caro. Focused on developing “Keywords in Indigenous Arts,” its curriculum aims to continue the work of identifying a vocabulary best suited for discussing Indigenous arts—on its own terms. **Bard College** (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), under the direction of Dr. Christian Ayne Crouch, will organize a convening focusing on the relationship of the art and culture of Indigenous North America to global histories that will take place in Venice on October 26-28, 2024. Both of these partner programs focus on connecting Indigenous, Native American, and international undergraduate humanities students, graduate art students, and the public with the themes of the pavilion.

ABOUT U.S. PAVILION SPONSORS

Jeffrey Gibson's exhibition for the U.S. Pavilion, *the space in which to place me*, is made possible by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State. Presenting Support is provided by the Ford Foundation and Mellon Foundation. Lead Support is provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Major support is provided by Agnes Gund, Arison Arts Foundation, Carl & Marilyn Thoma Foundation, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, the Hearthland Foundation, the Henry Luce Foundation, Sotheby's, and the Terra Foundation for American Art. Generous support is provided by Becky and David Gochman, Bloomberg Philanthropies, the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund, Lisa Domenico Brooke, Pollock-Krasner Foundation, the Robert Lehman Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Sakana Foundation, the Schmidt Family Foundation, and the Teiger Foundation. Essential support is provided by Sasha and Edward P. Bass, the A&L Berg Foundation, David Bolger, Deborah Beckmann and Jacob Kotzubei, Dior, Elysabeth Kleinhans, the George Economou Collection, Pat and Leona Green, Laura Donnelley, Margaret Morgan and Wesley Phoa, the Nicolas Berggruen Charitable Trust, Pamela and David Hornik, Regina L. Aldisert, Roberts Projects, Sikkema Jenkins & Co., the Stephen Friedman Gallery, and the Trellis Art Fund.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Jeffrey Gibson (born 1972) is an interdisciplinary artist. A member of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and of Cherokee descent, Gibson grew up in major urban centers in the United States, Germany, and Korea. He received a bachelor of fine arts in painting from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1995 and master of arts in painting at the Royal College of Art, London, in 1998. He was awarded honorary doctorates from Claremont Graduate University (2016) and the Institute of American Indian Arts (2023). He is currently an artist-in-residence at Bard College.

Concurrent with the opening of the Biennale Arte 2024, Gibson's work is on view in *Jeffrey Gibson: no simple word for time* (Sainsbury Centre, Norwich) and *Unravel: The Power and Politics of Textiles in Art* (Barbican Centre, London). A forthcoming solo exhibition of the artist's work will debut at The Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA) on October 13, 2024. A new mural by the artist, created with MASS MoCA, will be on view in Boston's Dewey Square beginning June 1, 2024. Gibson has also been commissioned by The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York to create new works for the Museum's Fifth Avenue facade, which will be unveiled in September 2025.

Recent solo exhibitions and projects include *Jeffrey Gibson: DREAMING OF HOW IT'S MEANT TO BE* (Stephen Friedman Gallery, London, 2024), *Jeffrey Gibson: ANCESTRAL SUPERBLOOM* (Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York, 2023), *This Burning World: Jeffrey Gibson* (ICA San Francisco, 2022), *Jeffrey Gibson: The Body Electric* (SITE Santa Fe, 2022), *Jeffrey Gibson: They Come From Fire* (Portland Art Museum, 2022), *Jeffrey Gibson: INFINITE INDIGENOUS QUEER LOVE* (deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, 2022), and *Jeffrey Gibson: Like A Hammer* (Denver Art Museum, 2018). In addition, the artist was commissioned to create sets for the New York City Ballet's *Copland Dance Episodes*, which premiered in the fall 2023 season. Gibson's work was also exhibited in the 2019 Whitney Biennial.

Gibson has received many distinguished awards, including a Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters and Sculptors Grant (2012), and a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Fellowship Award (2019). Gibson also conceived of and co-edited the landmark volume *An Indigenous Present* (2023), which showcases diverse approaches to Indigenous concepts, forms, and media. His work is included in the permanent collections of the Denver Art Museum; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Canada; Portland Art Museum; Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian; and Whitney Museum of American Art, among others.

ABOUT THE COMMISSIONERS/CURATORS

Kathleen Ash-Milby is the Curator of Native American Art at the Portland Art Museum, appointed in 2019. Previously, she organized numerous solo exhibitions at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian with artists including Oscar Howe (2022), Kay WalkingStick (2015), Meryl McMaster (2015), C. Maxx Stevens (2012), and Julie Buffalohead (2012). Her critically acclaimed thematic group exhibitions of Native art across a range of media include *Transformer: Native Art in Light and Sound* (2021) and *Off the Map: Landscape in the Native Imagination* (2007). From 2001 to 2005, she was curator and co-director of the American Indian Community House Gallery in New York City, a foundational, community-based nonprofit gallery. Ash-Milby has published widely, including contributions to books, exhibition catalogues, and publications such as *Art in America* and *Art Journal*. In 2015, she was a fellow in the Center for Curatorial Leadership Program in New York. A member of the Navajo Nation, she earned her master of arts in Native American art history from the University of New Mexico.

Louis Grachos is the Phillips Executive Director of SITE Santa Fe (SITE), appointed in 2021. With a thirty-year career in arts leadership, Grachos is recognized for his artist-centric vision and extensive relationships with artists and community collaborators. He helped launch SITE's Biennial, the first international art biennial in the United States, in his previous role as SITE's director from 1996 to 2003. At the 47th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia in 1997, Grachos oversaw the groundbreaking presentation of works by Robert Colescott, the first Black artist to represent the United States in a single-artist exhibition at the US pavilion at the International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia. Grachos served for two years as the CEO and JoAnn McGrath Executive Director of the Palm Springs Art Museum. From 2003 to 2012, he was the Ernest and Sarah Butler Executive Director and CEO of The Contemporary Austin in Texas and the Executive Director of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in New York, now renamed the Buffalo AKG Art Museum. He received a bachelor of arts from the University of Toronto and a certification in museum studies from John F. Kennedy University.

Abigail Winograd is an independent curator and writer. She is currently Co-Director and Chief Curator of Pueblo Unido Gallery, a community-generated art space situated within Centro Romero, a social service organization serving and advocating for the immigrant community on Chicago's North Side. She was previously curator-at-large and MacArthur Fellows Program Fortieth Anniversary Exhibition Curator at the

University of Chicago's Gray Center for Arts and Inquiry, a role she originated at the Smart Museum of Art in Chicago. Winograd's scholarly work focuses on postwar abstraction in South America and institutional approaches to expanding canonical histories. She has held positions at the Frans Hals Museum, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Blanton Museum of Art, and Art Institute of Chicago, and has curated exhibitions around the world. She has contributed to books and museum catalogues, published academic articles, and written for publications such as *Bomb*, *Mousse Magazine*, *Frieze*, and *Artforum*. She received a doctorate in art history from the University of Texas at Austin and has additional degrees from Northwestern University and the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

ABOUT PORTLAND ART MUSEUM

Among the oldest museums in the United States, the Portland Art Museum (PAM) is internationally recognized for its permanent collection and ambitious special exhibitions. Based in Portland, Oregon, PAM is distinguished for its long-standing commitment to showcasing the broad spectrum of Native American art, and its holdings also include renowned collections of Asian and graphic arts. With a diverse program that includes PAM CUT // Center for an Untold Tomorrow, which expands the reach of cinema as an art form, the museum is dedicated to creating opportunities for artists and access to art for the enrichment of our many audiences and diverse communities. The museum strives to be an inclusive, accessible institution that facilitates respectful dialogue and the free exchange of ideas through art within its campus of landmark buildings—a cornerstone of Portland's cultural district—and through its forthcoming expansion and renovation project that includes the construction of the Mark Rothko Pavilion (slated to open in mid-2025). portlandartmuseum.org

ABOUT SITE SANTA FE

Guided by artists and rooted in New Mexico, SITE Santa Fe celebrates contemporary creative expression. SITE Santa Fe aspires to be an internationally recognized destination for art and artists and a community resource for creativity and learning. Founded in 1995 to establish the first international contemporary art biennial in the United States, SITE Santa Fe is a non-collecting art institution committed to supporting new developments in contemporary art, encouraging artistic exploration, and expanding traditional museum experiences. Since its launch, SITE Santa Fe has presented eleven international biennials, more than one hundred contemporary art exhibitions, and works by hundreds of emerging and established artists from around the world and in New Mexico. SITE Santa Fe also presents a wide range of public and educational programs that include conversations with artists and curators, performances, film screenings, concerts, hands-on workshops, and collaborations with dozens of local schools and community organizations. sitesantafe.org

ABOUT LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA

Established in 1895, La Biennale di Venezia is acknowledged today as one of the most prestigious cultural institutions. The International Art Exhibition is considered the most prestigious contemporary art exhibition, introducing hundreds of thousands of visitors to exciting new art every two years. The 60th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia (April 20 – November 24, 2024) is curated by Adriano Pedrosa.

The United States Pavilion at the Giardini della Biennale, a building in the neoclassical style, opened on May 4, 1930. Since 1986, The U.S. Pavilion has been owned by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation and managed by the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, which works closely with the Department of State and exhibition curators to install and maintain all official U.S. exhibitions presented in the Pavilion. Every two years, museum curators from across the U.S. detail their visions for the U.S. Pavilion in

proposals that are reviewed by the NEA Federal Advisory Committee on International Exhibitions (FACIE), a group comprising curators, museum directors, and artists who then submit their recommendations to the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Past exhibitions can be viewed on the Peggy Guggenheim Collection website at: <https://www.guggenheim-venice.it/en/art/us-pavilion/>

The United States Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs supports and manages official U.S. participation at the International Art and Architecture Exhibitions of La Biennale di Venezia. The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) builds relations between the people of the United States and the people of other countries through academic, cultural, sports, professional, and private exchanges, as well as public-private partnerships and mentoring programs.

These exchange programs improve foreign relations and strengthen the national security of the United States, support U.S. international leadership, and provide a broad range of domestic benefits by helping break down barriers that often divide us, like religion, politics, language and ethnicity, and geography. ECA programs build connections that engage and empower people and motivate them to become leaders and thinkers, to develop new skills, and to find connections that will create positive change in their communities. For more information, please visit <https://exchanges.state.gov/us>

Press Contacts:

Caroline McKinley/Julia Exelbert/Jenny Levine/Violet O'Neill
Resnicow and Associates
212-671-5162/212-671-5155/212-671-5189/212-671-5151
2024USPavilion@resnicow.com

Office of Public Affairs and Strategic Communications
The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs
202-632-6452 / ECA-Press@state.gov