

WHITNEY

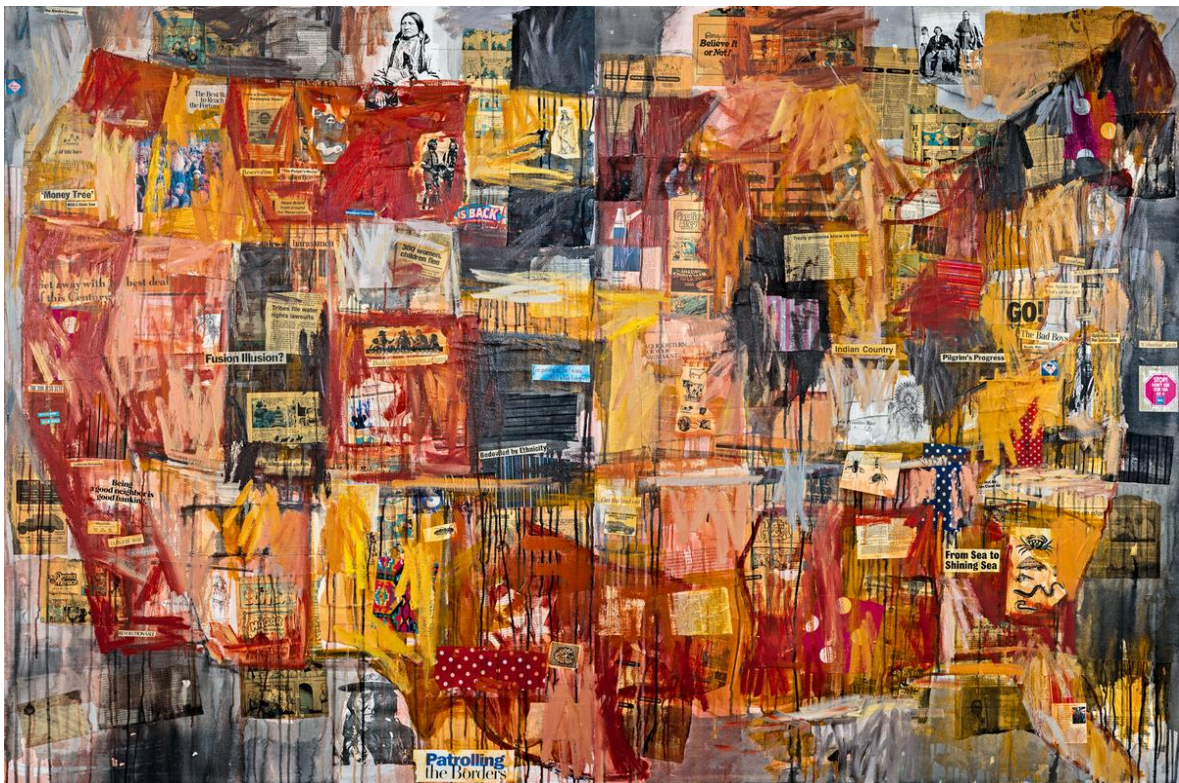
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PRESS RELEASE

THE WHITNEY MUSEUM PRESENTS THE LARGEST RETROSPECTIVE OF JAUNE QUICK-TO-SEE SMITH'S ARTWORK



Opening April 19, 2023, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith: Memory Map recognizes Smith's nearly five-decade career as an artist, activist, curator, educator, and advocate.

New York, NY, March 21, 2023 — *Jaune Quick-to-See Smith: Memory Map*, on view at the Whitney Museum of American Art from April 19 through August 13, 2023, is a recognition of a groundbreaking artist's work. For nearly five decades, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, a citizen of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Nation, has charted an exceptional and unorthodox career as an artist, activist, curator, educator, and advocate. The exhibition highlights how Smith uses her drawings, prints, paintings, and sculptures to flip commonly held historical narratives and illuminate absurdities in the dominant culture.

Memory Map is the largest and most comprehensive showcase of Smith's career, featuring more than one hundred thirty works. Organized thematically across the Museum's third and fifth floors, the exhibition offers a new framework to consider contemporary Native American art, addressing how Smith has led and initiated some of the most pressing dialogues around land, racism, and cultural preservation. It celebrates the artist's dedication to creativity and community and emphasizes her deep political commitments, essential and potent reminders of our responsibilities to the earth and each other.

Smith engages with modern and contemporary modes of artmaking, from an idiosyncratic adoption of abstraction to American Pop art to Neo-Expressionism. She reimagines these artistic traditions with concepts rooted in her own cultural practice to examine contemporary life in America and interpret it through Native ideology. Since the 1970s, Smith has built a visual language that includes recurring imagery, such as trade canoes, horses, bison, and flags, and common materials like newspaper, fabric, and commercial objects. Throughout her works, she addresses urgent concerns of ecological disaster, the misreading of history, and the genocide of Native Americans, while also evoking the power of kinship and education.

"The Whitney Museum is honored to collaborate with Jaune Quick-to-See Smith at this important moment in her career, and we are grateful to her for trusting us to organize the exhibition, *Memory Map*," said Adam D. Weinberg, the Whitney's Alice Pratt Brown Director. "As the first retrospective of an Indigenous artist organized by the Whitney, this exhibition is long overdue. Smith is not only a monumental artist but also a mentor, exemplar, and powerful influence to younger generations of Native American artists. She has brought exposure and offered encouragement to hundreds of Indigenous artists over her career. This exhibition encourages us to look at Smith and her peers anew, to be mindful of our prejudices, and to be vigilant and self-critical in our use of art historical labels and frameworks in our work moving forward."

This exhibition is organized by Laura Phipps, Assistant Curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art, with Caitlin Chaisson, Curatorial Project Assistant.

"I am immensely grateful for the trust and partnership of Jaune in every stage of this tremendous exhibition," says Phipps. "Jaune casts a wide net, and through our travels, conversations, and time in the studio, I have come to understand the awesome significance of bringing people together and the broad impact that her work has in the art world and beyond. Learning from Jaune has been a perspective-shifting experience, and it is thrilling to have the opportunity to share her life's work with our audiences at the Whitney."

"The oldest art museum in New York was inaugurated sometime in the late 1800s, 150 years ago, and there are younger art museums approximately 90 years old, yet I am the first Native woman to have a major retrospective in New York City," said Jaune Quick-to-See Smith. "The Whitney has jumped off the cliff and shattered the status quo. Hallelujah for them making this risky move. For what is the risk worth? It offers us more Native artists, the Nation's First Peoples, our Original Peoples, to become part of the mainstream art world. I am deeply grateful

to the Whitney, as well as Garth Greenan Gallery, for their kind, supportive, diligent work over four years. We are making history; we are plowing new ground; we are opening a staid, closed, colonial door. I am so thankful, lemlents, lemlents.”

Exhibition Overview — Jaune Quick-to-See Smith: Memory Map

Jaune Quick-to-See Smith: Memory Map highlights the artist’s lifelong approach to storytelling, rooted in her abiding respect for and connection to the land. Today Smith lives and works in New Mexico, but she spent her early years between the Pacific Northwest and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai lands in western Montana. Her work draws attention to the continued existence of Indigenous peoples despite centuries of attempted erasure by waves of European invaders and the policies of the United States government. Smith emphasizes that it is important that her work “leaves an imprint on the land that says, ‘we are here, we have been here, and these are our stories.’ These are my stories, every picture. Every drawing tells a story. I create memory maps.”

Early Work

Smith knew from an early age that she wanted to be an artist but was discouraged early on by professors who didn’t believe women—much less Native women—could have careers as artists. In the 1970s and early 1980s, Smith drew and painted places with personal significance, including Wallowa, Oregon, and her reservation. These works, which she came to describe as maps, reject conventions employed by Western landscape painters. Instead of romanticized panoramas that survey unpopulated lands from a distance, Smith depicts inhabited places, her mark-making conveying human and animal movements. Many of the early works exhibited in *Memory Map*, like *Indian Madonna Enthroned* (1974), have rarely been on view to the public.

Dedication to Land

Between 1985 and 1989, Smith concentrated on two series that highlight her role as an activist and artist: *Petroglyph Park* and *Chief Seattle (C.S.)*. Despite their stylistic differences, both bodies of work demonstrate Smith’s engagement with ongoing land rights conflicts and historical injustices. Smith became active in land preservation efforts and supported campaigns to save areas of New Mexico where ancient petroglyphs were at risk of being destroyed due to residential development efforts. *Petroglyph Park* is the first series in which Smith responded directly to news media, an approach that has since been integral to her practice. Works in the *Chief Seattle (C.S.)* series continue the artist’s critique of reckless extraction and industrialization and consider broader regional and global environmental concerns such as acid rain and dependence on fossil fuels. While mainstream environmentalism at the time concentrated on issues like pollution and recycling, Smith’s work draws a connection between the exploitation of land and resources with blatant disregard for treaties between the U.S. government and Native American nations. With the paintings and drawings in *Petroglyph Park* and *Chief Seattle*, Smith implores future generations to understand their connection to the land and work to forestall ecological crisis.

Depictions of a Postcolonial World

In response to the 1992 U.S. quincentennial celebration of Christopher Columbus landing in the Americas, Smith sought to bring attention to the fact that Columbus's arrival led to one of the largest and most sustained genocides in human history. This period marks some of Smith's most prolific work as an artist, curator, and collaborator. She created dozens of new artworks and organized exhibitions and "anti-celebration" events with her peers. Though her politics had always been embedded in her work, this particular moment in American history became Smith's opportunity to develop more direct and transparent approaches in her work. She introduced many of her now iconic motifs, like the trade canoe and bison, and techniques like collage. Works in this section, such as *I See Red: Snowman* (1992) confront the violence of displacement and the extreme inequities of the earliest negotiations between Indigenous peoples and settlers in North America.

Reflections on Invasion

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, in response to U.S.-led invasions domestically and abroad, Smith's work considers the conflicts incited by both colonialism and imperialism. A 1993 series of prints and drawings depict a well-known image of General George Armstrong Custer, the U.S. Army officer known for his deadly campaigns against Lakota, Arapaho, and Northern Cheyenne people in the late 1860s. Moving forward in time, paintings and prints from the 2000s communicate Smith's outrage over the invasion of Iraq and President George W. Bush's post-9/11 policies. Smith's work from this period conveys her visceral and consuming reaction to the horrors of war. Paintings like *Trade Canoe for Don Quixote* (2004) use art historical references like Picasso's *Guernica*, images of Sumerian artifacts looted from the Iraq Museum, and political cartoons by José Guadalupe Posada, to highlight how cultural property is targeted and weaponized in these conflicts.

Critiques of Capitalism and Consumerism

In recent decades, Smith's work offers a biting critique of the elements of American culture dominated by capitalism and consumerism. Frequently employing satire and humor in her paintings and prints, Smith has targeted the imported concepts of property and commodity goods, which decimated Indigenous economies, diets, and medicinal practices. She has also taken aim at manifest destiny, an Anglo-Christian doctrine that positioned westward expansion and the attempted extermination of Indigenous peoples as part of a divine plan. The repercussions of these policies live on in the many ways that contemporary consumer culture has infiltrated Native American traditions. In works like *The Rancher* (2002), Smith draws connections between visual tropes of the "Wild West," like the "cowboys and Indians" seen in advertising and entertainment, and the seemingly unlimited reach of corporate influences in even the smallest and most personal experiences of contemporary daily life.

Legacy and Matriarchy

Smith often makes a simple but profound observation: "My existence is a miracle." Despite genocide, decades of war, forced assimilation, and systemic oppression, she and other Indigenous survivors are still here to practice and share their culture. Throughout her work, Smith acknowledges that the wisdom of ancestors and elders is not only sacred but essential for

protecting and preserving traditions for future generations. Throughout her career, Smith has represented matriarchal leaders across many works, conveying the individuality and strength of women who juggle their responsibilities to family and community in the face of prejudice and discrimination.

U.S. Maps

The map of the United States is one of the most central and recognizable motifs throughout Smith's paintings, drawings, and prints. Her works reveal the falsehoods and assumptions underlying this supposedly objective image, challenging its authority and symbolic power. In Smith's interpretations of the map of North America, the land transgresses and overruns current borders, demonstrates changing populations and notions of citizenship, and foregrounds how Indigenous peoples have shaped this continent since long before the European invasion. Smith's works reflect her philosophy of maps: they are pictures of experiences rather than edges of geopolitical borders—an understanding of land that privileges relationships, stories, and memory.

Environment and Intervention

The industry and government abuse and mismanagement of the environment have been key concerns in Smith's work throughout her career. As the artist has said, "ecology is a science that has been practiced by the Native peoples on this continent for thousands of years. For instance, in my tribe, after harvesting the bitterroot for the spring feast, there is the specific act of cleaning the bitterroot plants to ensure next year's crop. This is giving back. This has been our way of survival."

Trickster

Smith's art continues the storytelling tradition she grew up with. From an early age, she heard the creation stories of the Salish people from her grandmothers and aunts. Coyote plays an important role in these stories. First sent by the Creator to prepare the earth for humans, Coyote taught the Salish about spirituality and the sacred relationship of people to the land and all living creatures. But Coyote is also a trickster whose lessons reveal the chaos and hubris of human lives and actions. Smith embraces the duality of teacher and trickster in her artistic practice: "The creator, inventor, satirist must show the flip side of things. They turn things upside down in order to lampoon the immorality or insincerity of politicians, priests, or heads of government or show the human condition."

About the Artist

Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (b. 1940) is a citizen of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Nation, Montana. Smith has been creating complex abstract paintings and prints since the 1970s. Combining appropriated imagery from commercial slogans and signage, art history, and personal narratives, she forges an intimate visual language to convey her insistent socio-political commentary with powerful clarity. Smith's multifaceted work is grounded in themes of personal and political identity.

Smith received an AA degree from Olympic College in Bremerton, Washington, in 1960; a BA in art education from Framingham State College, Massachusetts, in 1976; and an MA in Visual Arts from the University of New Mexico in 1980.

Smith has received numerous awards, including the Academy of Arts and Letters Purchase Award (1987); Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters & Sculptors Grant (1996); Women's Caucus for the Arts Lifetime Achievement Award (1997); College Art Association Women in the Arts Award (2002); New Mexico Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts (2005); ArtTable Artist Honoree (2011); Georgia O'Keeffe Museum Living Artist of Distinction Award (2012); Montana Governor's Award (2018); New York Foundation for the Arts Murray Reich Distinguished Artist Award (2019); United States Artists Fellowship (2020); Anonymous Was A Woman Award (2022); and Barnard College's Medal of Distinction (2022). Smith has been honored with honorary doctorates from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design (1992); Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia (1998); Massachusetts College of Art and Design, Boston (2003); and the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque (2009).

Smith's work is in the collections of the Albuquerque Museum; Brooklyn Museum, New York; Eiteljorg Museum, Indianapolis; Heard Museum, Phoenix; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Missoula Art Museum, Montana; Museo de Arte Moderno, Quito, Ecuador; National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and Yellowstone Art Museum, Montana, among many others.

Catalogue

An accompanying exhibition catalogue, *Jaune Quick-to-See Smith: Memory Map*, published by the Whitney and distributed by Yale University Press, features essays by curator Laura Phipps, Candice Hopkins, Richard William Hill, and Josie M. Lopez, along with a conversation between Jaune Quick-to-See Smith and Lowery Stokes Sims. The publication includes illustrations of nearly five decades of Smith's work in all media accompanied by poems and texts by contemporary Indigenous artists and scholars on Smith's major bodies of work. Copies will be available for purchase online and in the Whitney Shop (\$65).

Free Public Programs

A series of free virtual and in-person programs are offered in conjunction with *Jaune Quick-to-See Smith: Memory Map*. More information about these programs and how to register will be available on the Museum's website as details are confirmed.

Exhibition Tickets

Visitors can purchase timed tickets for *Jaune Quick-to-See Smith: Memory Map*, on view April 19–August 13, 2023. More ticketing information is available on the Museum's website.

Press Preview

The Whitney Museum will host a press preview on Wednesday, April 12, 10 am–1 pm. RSVP to the press preview by [filling out this form](#). A photography and broadcast hour will start at 9 am

and requires registration. Please contact pressoffice@whitney.org with any questions about the photography and broadcast hour. Remarks by Adam D. Weinberg, the Alice Pratt Brown Director, Scott Rothkopf, Senior Deputy Director and Nancy and Steve Crown Family Chief Curator, and exhibition curator Laura Phipps will begin at 10:30 am.

Whitney Museum Land Acknowledgement

The Whitney is located in Lenapehoking, the ancestral homeland of the Lenape. The name Manhattan comes from their word Mannahatta, meaning “island of many hills.” The Museum’s current site is close to land that was a Lenape fishing and planting site called Saponnkanikan (“tobacco field”). The Whitney acknowledges the displacement of this region’s original inhabitants and the Lenape diaspora that exists today.

As a museum of American art in a city with vital and diverse communities of Indigenous people, the Whitney recognizes the historical exclusion of Indigenous artists from its collection and program. The Museum is committed to addressing these erasures and honoring the perspectives of Indigenous artists and communities as we work for a more equitable future. To read more about the Museum’s Land Acknowledgement, [visit the Museum’s website](#).

PRESS CONTACT

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ABOUT THE WHITNEY

The Whitney Museum of American Art, founded in 1930 by the artist and philanthropist Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875–1942), houses the foremost collection of American art from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Mrs. Whitney, an early and ardent supporter of modern American art, nurtured groundbreaking artists when audiences were still largely preoccupied with the Old Masters. From her vision arose the Whitney Museum of American Art, which has been championing the most innovative art of the United States for ninety years. The core of the Whitney's mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit American art of our time and serve a wide variety of audiences in celebration of the complexity and diversity of art and culture in the United States. Through this mission and a steadfast commitment to artists, the Whitney has long been a powerful force in support of modern and contemporary art and continues to help define what is innovative and influential in American art today.

VISITOR INFORMATION

The Whitney Museum of American Art is located at 99 Gansevoort Street between Washington and West Streets, New York City. Public hours are: Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday, 10:30 am–6 pm; Friday, 10:30 am–10 pm; and Saturday and Sunday, 10:30 am–6 pm. Closed Tuesday. Visitors eighteen years and under and Whitney members: FREE. Admission is pay-what-you-wish on Fridays, 7–10 pm. COVID-19 vaccination and face coverings are not

required but strongly recommended. We encourage all visitors to wear face coverings that cover the nose and mouth throughout their visit.

Image caption:

Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, *Indian Map*, 1992. Oil, paper, newspaper, and fabric on canvas, two panels: 64 × 96 in. (162.6 × 243.8 cm) overall. Private collection. © Jaune Quick-to-See Smith. Photograph by David Bowers

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