

IMAGES AVAILABLE

Molly Morris, Saint Louis Art Museum
molly.morris@slam.org

‘Action/Abstraction Redefined’ expands narrative of midcentury abstraction to include Native American artists

ST. LOUIS, April 11, 2023—The Saint Louis Art Museum this summer will present “Action/Abstraction Redefined: Modern Native Art, 1940s–1970s,” the museum’s first exhibition to focus on modern and contemporary Native American art.

The exhibition will open in St. Louis with a free, public preview celebration at 4 pm on Friday, June 23 and continue through Sept. 3.

The exhibition is organized by Santa Fe’s Museum of Contemporary Native Arts at the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA), a Native-American led institution with a deep, focused collection. SLAM curators will expand the number of works in the touring exhibition from 52 to approximately 90—supplementing with works from national lenders and the museum’s collection—to provide more context for the remarkable story of abstraction during the first decade of the IAIA.

Like Abstract Expressionist artists, who broke with representational conventions and prioritized experimentation, artists at IAIA redefined the concept of abstraction following World War II. Combining ancestral aesthetics and art influences coming out of New York, artists in the exhibition pushed the boundaries of Native art media, subjects and styles to develop the field of contemporary Native Art.

In 2008, the Saint Louis Art Museum presented “Action/Abstraction: Pollock, de Kooning, and American Art, 1940–1976,” an exhibition organized by the Jewish Museum in New York in collaboration with SLAM and the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, N.Y. This new exhibition builds on and responds to that earlier exhibition, with a focus specifically on Native American artists and their influences.



Fritz Scholder, American and Luiseño, 1937–2005; “New Mexico #40”, 1966; acrylic on canvas; 73 1/2 x 51 1/2 inches; IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, Santa Fe; © Estate of Fritz Scholder



Henry "Hank" Delano Gobin, (Kwi Tlum Kadim), Tulalip/Snohomish, 1941–2013; "Northwest Design", 1966; casein, tissue paper, ink pen on paper; 18 x 22 inches; Institute of American Indian Arts / Museum of Contemporary Native Arts Collection (SNH-6), Honors Collection; © Henry "Hank" Delano Gobin



Christine Nofchissey McHorse, Navajo, 1948–2021; "Who Knows?"; monoprint on paper; 15 1/4 x 20 inches; IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, Santa Fe; © Estate of Christine Nofchissey McHorse

“Presenting this exhibition is an important opportunity for the Saint Louis Art Museum to continue our work to expand the narratives of American art while engaging our visitors with works of exceptional quality,” said Min Jung Kim, the Barbara B. Taylor Director of the Saint Louis Art Museum.

In the 1940s, Indigenous artists began to create work that overtly challenged received definitions of Native American art. These artists studied global art from across human history, drew freely from past Native American art and responded to current trends in mainstream modern art. Innovative artists—including Fritz Scholder, Lloyd Kiva New and Linda Lomahaftewa—explored new modes of artistic expression in studios across the nation and especially at the IAIA, which was founded in 1962.

The IAIA nurtured innovation and encouraged experimentation as artists combined styles and methods of the New York school with abstract forms based in historical Native art. “Action/Abstraction Redefined” introduces audiences to this exciting body of artwork and deepens scholarship by highlighting many women artists whose work remains largely unknown even among specialists.

“‘Action/Abstraction Redefined’ will help visitors to see our historic collection of Native American art in new ways, as vital sources for contemporary artists,” said Alexander Brier Marr, SLAM’s Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Assistant Curator of Native American Art who curated the St. Louis presentation of the exhibition. “It will also help visitors to connect historic and contemporary Native art. As our collection of contemporary Native American art from last 30 years grows, this exhibition furnishes a critical middle chapter in the continuous history of artmaking by Indigenous North American peoples.”

The exhibition also provides the opportunity to fill chronological gaps in the museum’s collection. In March 2023, the Museum purchased Fritz Scholder’s 1966 oil on canvas “New Mexico #45,” the first postwar painting by a Native American artist to join the collection. Marr noted that SLAM’s other holdings of Native American art provide many examples of the historical abstraction that IAIA artists engaged in their work. In recent years, the museum has also made it a priority to acquire contemporary works by Native American artists, including Truman Lowe, Wendy Red Star, Dyani White Hawk and others.

The touring exhibition is curated by Manuela Well-Off-Man, chief curator, IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts; Tatiana Lomahaftewa-Singer, curator of collections, IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts; and Lara Evans, IAIA associate professor of Native Art History.

Exhibition-related events

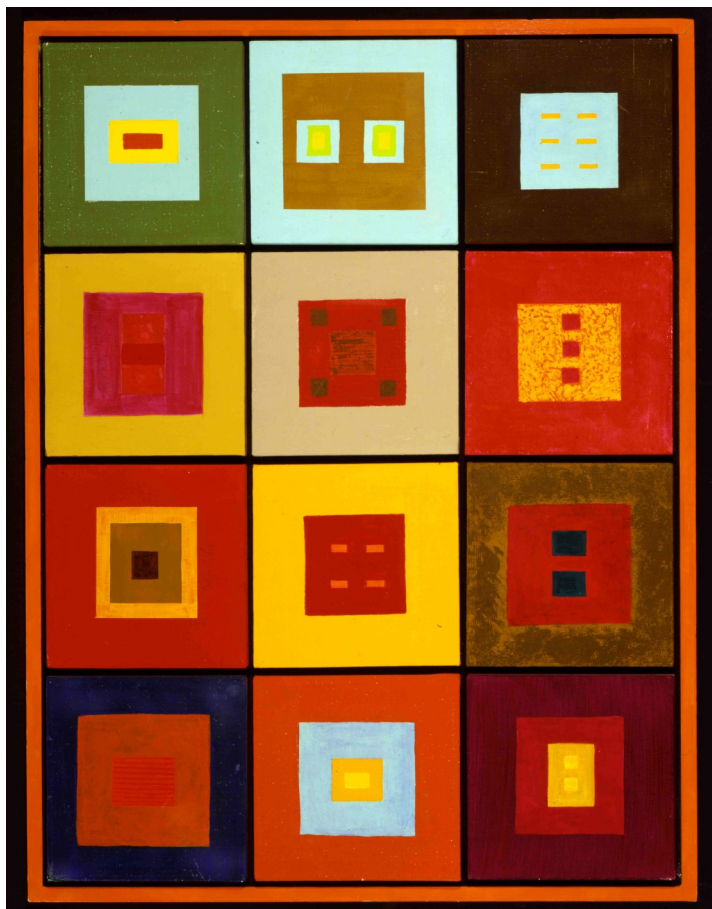
“Action/Abstraction Redefined” will open June 23 with a public preview from 4 pm to 8 pm featuring cocktails and entertainment in Sculpture Hall. Tickets to the exhibition will be free that evening, and docents stationed in the galleries will discuss works on view.

Also on June 23, three artists whose works are featured in the exhibition will discuss their time at the Institute of American Indian Arts and how it shaped their work. Marr, who curated the St. Louis presentation of the exhibition, will moderate the discussion with artists Anita Fields, Linda Lomahaftewa and Alfred Young Man.

The panel conversation begins at 6 pm in SLAM’s Farrell Auditorium. Tickets are \$5 on MetroTix; members are free.

“Action/Abstraction” will also be the focus of a Family Sunday event from 1 pm to 4 pm on June 25. The free event will feature dancing and an abstract collage art project for children.

The Saint Louis Art Museum is one of the nation’s leading comprehensive art museums with collections that include works of art of exceptional quality from virtually every culture and time period. Areas of notable depth include Oceanic art, ancient American art, ancient Chinese bronzes and European and American art of the late 19th and 20th centuries, with particular strength in 20th-century German art. Admission to the Saint Louis Art Museum is free to all every day. For more information, call 314.721.0072 or visit slam.org.



Lloyd Kiva New, Cherokee; “Untitled”, 1968; acrylic on canvas; 42 1/4 x 31 1/2 inches; Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, Santa Fe CHE-23; © Lloyd Kiva New