Denver Art Museum debuts first major exhibition featuring artist Jeffrey Gibson

DENVER, COLO.- The Denver Art Museum will present contemporary artist Jeffrey Gibson’s first major museum exhibition, showcasing his acclaimed multi-disciplinary work from 2011 to the present. On view May 13–Aug. 12, 2018, Jeffrey Gibson: Like a Hammer will feature about 65 objects comprising large and mid-sized figurative works, text-based wall hangings, a significant selection of his illustrious Everlast beaded punching bags, painted works on rawhide and canvas, as well as videos.
Organized by the DAM and curated by John Lukavic, curator of Native Arts, the exhibition will chronicle a pivotal moment in the artist’s career when his contemporary artistic practice converged with his Native American heritage.

“Jeffrey Gibson is widely recognized as a unique and influential voice in contemporary art as well as within Native American art circles, and we are eager to present his first major museum exhibition, which is bold in both color and scale,” said Christoph Heinrich, Frederick and Jan Mayer Director of the DAM. “This exhibition builds on our ongoing initiative to showcase contemporary art by American Indian artists. It is also a continuation of our emphasis on organizing monographic exhibitions, exposing, and in some cases introducing, our visitors to a single artist’s creative process.”

Jeffrey Gibson: Like a Hammer will reveal how the artist draws upon his heritage and remixes his older works to create a distinct visual vocabulary in artworks that explore his multi-faceted identity and the history of modernism. Gibson’s abstract works take inspiration from his Choctaw and Cherokee heritage, pan-Native American visual culture, alternative subcultures and the artist’s experiences living abroad as well as popular culture.

Materials used in the works on view will include rawhide, tipi poles, sterling silver, wool blankets, metal cones, beads, fringe and sinew. Exploration of materials and striking patterned and textured works in the form of punching bags and wall hangings will incorporate text from poems, Gibson’s own voice and popular song lyrics such as Stevie Wonder’s “Sir Duke.”

“Gibson seamlessly blends indigenous aesthetics and contemporary methods,” said Lukavic. “His work offers our visitors an experience that doesn’t exist elsewhere and challenges the generic categories of art, presenting a new way of conceptualizing what people see and experience.”

Gibson frequently explores colonialism and the post-colonial mindset, reflecting on how American Indian experiences parallel other civil rights movements. His work also revolves around universal themes of love, community, strength, vulnerability and survival.

Through this exhibition, catalog and related programming, visitors will be able to gain an enhanced understanding of Gibson’s distinctive and complex creative practice, as well as how it has evolved from series to series.

"Like a Hammer will feature works from one of the most important periods of my career so far," said Gibson. "The exhibition begins with artworks that I made just after nearly giving up making art altogether due to feeling misunderstood as an artist and struggling to establish a personal language that describes my experience without compromising it. The objects, sculptures and paintings I’ve made since 2011 document this journey of establishing my own forward-looking voice influenced by all that has come before me."

The museum will publish the first exhibition catalog to comprehensively detail Gibson’s career and body of work. The publication will feature essays by leading scholars in the contemporary and American Indian art fields that provide a range of perspectives on Gibson’s work, including Anne Ellegood, senior curator at the Hammer Museum, and Glenn Adamson, senior scholar, Yale University. The catalog will be available in The Shops at the DAM.