

Paintings from the Heard Collection

The Heard Museum Presents a Dynamic View of Native Painting Through the Decades in 2026

By Roshii Montaña, Curator



In 2002, the Heard Museum invited artist Kay WalkingStick (Cherokee) to guest-curate *So Fine! Masterworks of Fine Art from the Heard Museum*, an exhibition that offered a revelatory view of the collection through the discerning eye of an artist and scholar. More than 20 years later, WalkingStick returns as co-curator of *Paintings from the Heard*

Collection, bringing her insight to a new selection of more than 30 large-scale works by Native artists whose practices span generations, geographies, and aesthetic approaches. From early modernists such as Fritz Scholder and Joan Hill to leading contemporary voices including Kent Monkman, Emmi Whitehorse, and Steven Yazzie, the exhibition traces a dynamic and evolving conversation within Indigenous painting.

Image (left): Norman Akers (Osage Nation), *Balancing Act*, 1990. Oil on canvas. Gift of Albion and Lynne Fenderson.

In the catalogue, *So Fine!*, WalkingStick's essay "Great American Artists," outlines her expectations of art's purpose and power. "I expect great art to move me, to touch me, to express something meaningful," she writes. "I want to laugh, cry, be mystified or enlightened... Great art is often about the mythic, if we understand the mythic to mean the great unknowables — Birth, Life, Death, Creation, God." Her reflections resonate profoundly today, offering a lens through which to consider the works assembled in this new exhibition.

As I collaborated with WalkingStick on *Paintings from the Heard Collection*, it became clear that her earlier words continue to guide her thinking. We talked about technique and formal decisions, but the most memorable conversations emerged when a painting called forth an artist's life story or prompted shared contemplation of land and memory. To me, these moments embody what WalkingStick names as "great" in art.

Many of the works in this exhibition are among the largest in the Heard's collection, and several will be on view for the first time in decades. The presentation opens in the Freeman Gallery alongside *Kay WalkingStick / Hudson River School* (on view through May 25, 2026), and will expand into the Grand Gallery on June 26, 2026.

Together, these exhibitions invite visitors to reflect on land, place, and the shifting vocabulary of Native expression within the broader narrative of American Art.

Paintings from the Heard Collection honors artists who have shaped and continue to shape the field of contemporary art. It offers a renewed vision of the Heard Museum's ongoing commitment to presenting the depth, innovation, and enduring presence of Indigenous creativity.

Image (header): Kay WalkingStick (Cherokee), *Uncontrolled Destiny*, 1989. Acrylic, oil, and wax on canvas. Gift of Kay WalkingStick in memory of R. Michael Echols. Heard Museum collection.



About the Author

Roshii Montañó (Diné) is a Curator at the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona. Previously, she was an Andrew W. Mellon Fellow at the Heard Museum and also held positions at Stanford University, LACMA, Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, and more. Montañó received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Stanford University and a Master of Arts from Arizona State University.