



Anila Quayyum Agha, *The Greys in Between (Walking With My Yesterdays and Flowers Once Yours)* (2018). Collection of the artist, on display in 2019 at the Toledo Museum of Art in the exhibition "Between Light and Shadow." Courtesy Westmoreland Museum of American Art. ©Anila Quayyum Agha

From hundreds of museum exhibitions this month, these names stand out.

I'm back with my quarterly look at which artists are getting the most attention from museums in the United States.

How the Project Works:

I comb through the temporary exhibitions at hundreds of museums, counting which living artists were on view at any time during the same month. Only a few hundred artists (out of thousands) appear in more than one exhibition.

The order of my list represents which artists I think are having the best month, based on the combination of the number and type of shows they are in. I rank career retrospectives highly, followed by dedicated exhibitions, followed by special commissions or spotlights on a specific work, biennial appearances, and then inclusions in group shows. Because I'm most interested in breadth of influence, I don't make distinctions between bigger and smaller institutions.

There's no central source for this data, and museum websites are not always complete or reliable. New data could change the picture. If I missed anything, send me an email.

Thoughts on September's List:

At the moment, the major force ripping across U.S. museums is the government's grotesque attack on anything it terms "DEI." But museum shows are planned long in advance. We won't know what impact this political climate is having on long-term programming for months more at least.

As in all the versions of this list (which I started doing last year), the most-spotlighted figures in U.S. museums during September 2025 are Black and Indigenous artists. Almost all of the artists here make art that explicitly addresses racism or colonialism as a theme. Also extremely common as a theme is work about nature or the land.

In general, forms of eye-catching installation and sculpture continue to be the dominant medium, from the colorful textile environments of **Jeffrey Gibson** to the magic lanterns of **Anila Quayyum Agha**. For what it's worth, big, splashy painting is a presence, via **Firelei Báez** and **Rashid Johnson**—though both of these artists have retrospectives that veer in the direction of immersive spectacle.

Conversely, even some of the artists who work in more experimental media also create objects that are painting-like: **Jennie C. Jones** makes abstract painting-like objects that are plays on acoustic absorption panels; **Ai Weiwei** builds paintings with Legos.

Ai, who lives in Portugal, is the only non-U.S.-based artist here. In general, U.S. museums have not been very interested in figures from outside the States for some time now.

Here's the September list.

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Jeffrey Gibson



Installation view of Jeffrey Gibson: the space in which to place me at The Broad, Los Angeles, May 10 to September 28, 2025. Photo by Joshua White/JWPictures.com, courtesy of the Broad.

In ways that only become clear once you start preparing this list, a lot of subjectivity goes into figuring out who is having the best month. And yet, who's on top this month is as close to an objective fact as anything I have ever seen: Jeffrey Gibson continues to be absolutely everywhere, from his brand-new Met facade commission to a plethora of smaller shows on contemporary craft and Indigenous art.

As I said, museum programming tends to metabolize things that happened a little while ago. In this case, Gibson's 2024 U.S. Pavilion at the Venice Biennale is serving as a points multiplier. It is recreated in L.A. for his Broad show, and also diffuses up the coast to the Bay, where a version of the video from the pavilion is getting a spotlight at the Cantor Arts Center.

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Anila Quayyum Agha



Anila Quayyum Agha, *A thousand silent moments* at the Aga Khan Museum. (Photo by Nick Lachance/Toronto Star via Getty Images)

Lahore-born, Indianapolis-based Agha took an unusual path to prominence: She came to visibility back in 2014 at the now-defunct ArtPrize competition in Grand Rapids, Mich., where she swept the competition, winning both Critics and People's Choice awards.

She's having a very big month, and its contours reflect her unique place in art. She is *not* featured in a lot of group shows, but has no less than three museum shows focusing on her much-loved installations that function like lanterns, casting webs of shadows throughout the galleries around them. These eye-grabbing pieces are in shows at the Seattle Asian Art Museum and the Crow Museum in Dallas. Meanwhile, "Interwoven," her biggest retrospective yet which began at the Westmoreland Museum and is now at the Michener, gathers 20 years of work including her intricate collages.

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Marie Watt



Marie Watt, *Forest Shifts Light (Sequoia, Crest, Canopy)* (2025). Collection of the Jordan Schnitzer Family Foundation, © Marie Watt, Courtesy of the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art at Portland State University, Image Credit: Mario Gallucci

A member of the Seneca Nation of Indians, Watt often incorporates textiles into installations about Native history and ways of making. Her show "Storywork" continues a national tour and is now on view in Portland, where Watt is based.

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Andrea Carlson



Installation view of "Andrea Carlson: Shimmer on Horizons" at MCA Chicago. Photo: Robert Chase Heishman.

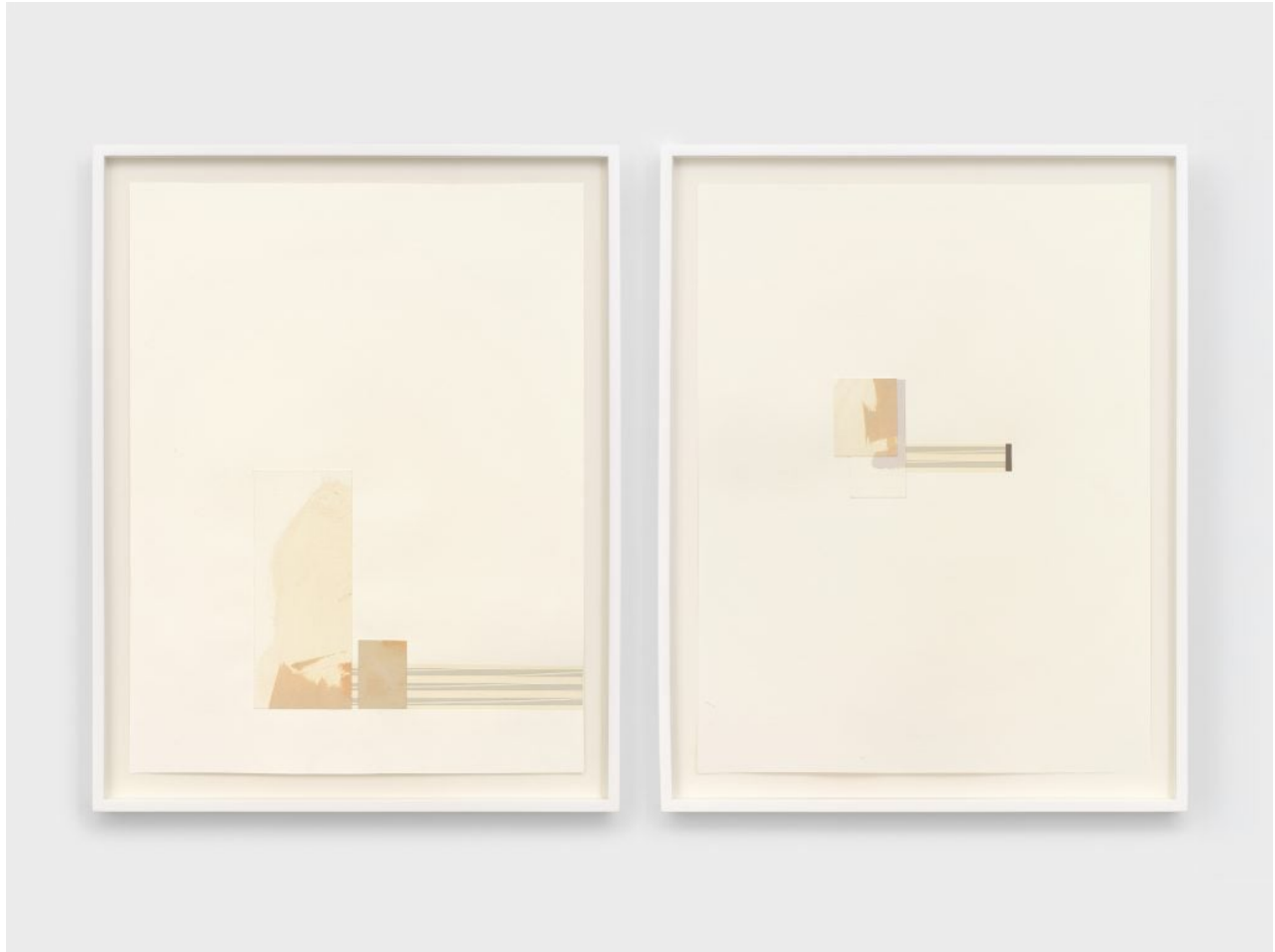
Carlson is best known for large, layered, and densely detailed canvasses that feature swirling images and eye-grabbing symmetry, reflecting on the Indigenous relationship to both landscape painting as a genre and the land. But she works across multiple mediums, including video, sculpture, and large-scale installation.

She's also a co-founder of the Chicago-based Center for Native Futures, and a writer. Back in 2020, Carlson wrote an essay for the art website *60 Inches From Center* blasting the MCA Chicago for its exclusion of Native artists. Four years later, her show "Shimmer on Horizons" (currently touring to the Kemper) originated at that same institution. (Worth mentioning: Carlson has a just-opened show, "The Lasting," at Jessica Silverman gallery in San Francisco.)

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Jennie C. Jones



Jennie C. Jones *Standing and Moving #1-2* (2024). Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, New York © 2025 Jennie C. Jones

In New York, Jones's rooftop commission for the Met has drawn plenty of attention—but it's in St. Louis at the Pulitzer Arts Foundation that she has her the biggest stage right now.

There, she's not only getting a show dedicated to her work, but also doing a new site-specific commission responding to the Pulitzer's building and collection. On top of that, the institution tapped Jones for her first-ever outing as a curator, with "Other Octaves," allowing her to bring together her work with artists of the 1960s and '70s who inspired her, from Maryanne Amacher to Zarina.

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Dawoud Bey



Dawoud Bey, *Conjoined Trees and Field* (2019). Rennie Collection, Vancouver, BC, Canada. © Dawoud Bey.

As Bey explained a few years ago when a big touring career retrospective went to the Whitney, he makes work highlighting the stories of those marginalized by “the great American project.” This month the Chicago-based photographer’s photo and video work examining the traces of slavery in various U.S. landscapes get the most attention, via a pair of shows at institutions in the American South.

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Virgil Ortiz



Virgil Ortiz *Opera singer figure* (ca. 1999). Image Courtesy of Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian.

The Wheelwright Museum opened its Ortiz retrospective—which gathers work from the 1980s through the early 2000s, and also brings in art by members of his family—on the anniversary of the 1680 Pueblo Revolt. Dealing with that history has been a major theme for this artist. He gives it a sci-fi, Indigenous-Futurist spin for his long-term show at the Autry in L.A., which began as part of the show "Future Imaginaries: Indigenous Art, Fashion, Technology" in Pacific Standard Time.

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Bob Haozous



Bob Haozous, *Grandfather's Vision* (1978). Collection of Corrine Cain.

Active since the 1970s, the Warm Springs Chiricahua Apache artist Haozous has resisted any single style, instead describing his art as a "catalyst" for consciousness raising. "If I can inspire people to talk to each other about other things besides this quest for beauty," he's said, "then maybe we can create a cultural statement that comes directly from an Indigenous way of thinking." The Heard Museum's show marks the first major Haozous retrospective, with 75 works from across 60 years.

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Lorna Simpson



Installation view of "Lorna Simpson: Source Notes" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Photo by Eileen Travell, Courtesy of The Met.

The thread that holds Simpson's explorations in many different media together is her role as "an archivist, cataloging the lives and images of generations of African Americans," former *New York Times* executive editor Dean Baquet wrote a few years ago. Simpson's atmospheric paintings are center stage right now at the Met—but head up to Mount Holyoke if you want to see the kind of allusive multimedia work that made her famous, specifically in the form of her video called *Cloudscape* (2004).

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Ai Weiwei



Ai Weiwei Arm with the Finger in Bronze (2000). Image courtesy of The Albertina Museum, Vienna / Lisa Rastl and Reiner Riedler and Ai Weiwei Studio, Ai Weiwei.

The one-two punch of the Chinese artist's big retrospective at the Seattle Art Museum and the showing of his big Lego Monet at its sister institution, the Seattle Asian Art Museum, keeps him very visible this month. Even though it doesn't count for my purposes because it's not in a museum, I should mention that Ai is in the news for his big public art installation, *Camouflage*, just opened at Four Freedoms Park in New York.

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Shahzia Sikander



Shahzia Sikander, *Her-Vimana* (2024). Collection of the Artist, Courtesy of Shahzia Sikander and Sean Kelly, New York/Los Angeles, © Shahzia Sikander

While Jeffrey Gibson is still benefiting from the tour of his U.S. Pavilion at the 2024 Venice Biennale, Sikander is still benefiting from the collateral exhibition co-organized for that same edition of Venice by the Cincinnati and Cleveland museums, currently touring to the Cantor Arts Center as part of its Asian American Art Initiative. Meanwhile, in Washington, D.C., the Smithsonian is showing off its acquisition of Sikander's *The Last Post* (2010), an animation in the style of a miniature reflecting on British imperialism.

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Nicholas Galanin



Installation view of Nicholas Galanin, *Aáni yéi xat duwasáakw (I am called Land)* (2025) at the MassArt Art Museum (MAAM).
Courtesy of the artist and Peter Blum Gallery. Photo by Mel Tiang.

The Alaska-based multidisciplinary artist works in an agile conceptual-art tradition, full of humor but with a cutting edge. His installation at MassArt Art Museum was organized to coincide with the Boston Public Art Triennial, for which Galanin also created a sculpture of a deconstructed totem pole sited in Evans Way Park.

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Rashid Johnson



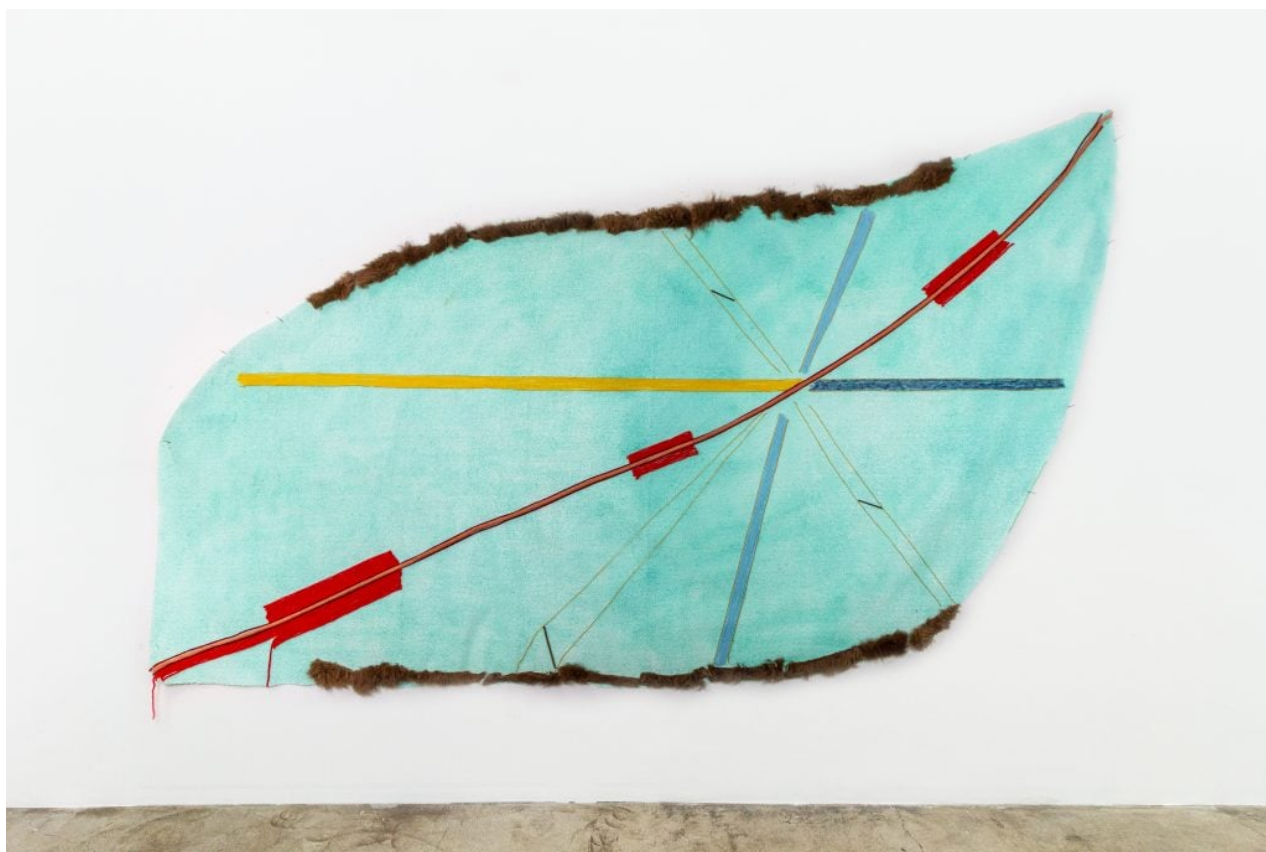
A group of plants apparently floating in mid-air are on display during Rashid Johnson's "A Poem for Deep Thinkers" at the Guggenheim on May 6, 2025 in New York. (Photo by Liao Pan/China News Service/VCG via Getty Images).

Johnson's spectacular Guggenheim career retrospective has kept him in the news all year. "The 47-year-old's works create conversations around race, masculinity, identity, and anxiety," *CBS Sunday Morning* raved in a segment on him, just weeks ago.

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Teresa Baker



Teresa Baker *Converging* (2023). © Teresa Baker. Tia Collection. Image Courtesy the artist and the de boer, Los Angeles, California; Photo: Jacob Phillip.

The L.A.-based Baker, a member of the Three Affiliated Tribes in the Great Plains, has a big retrospective at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, featuring bronzes, baskets, and works on paper—but what she is best known for are thoughtful paintings that function as abstract landscapes. “For me, land also holds people, it holds culture, and memories—I’m exploring all of that in my work,” she has said.

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