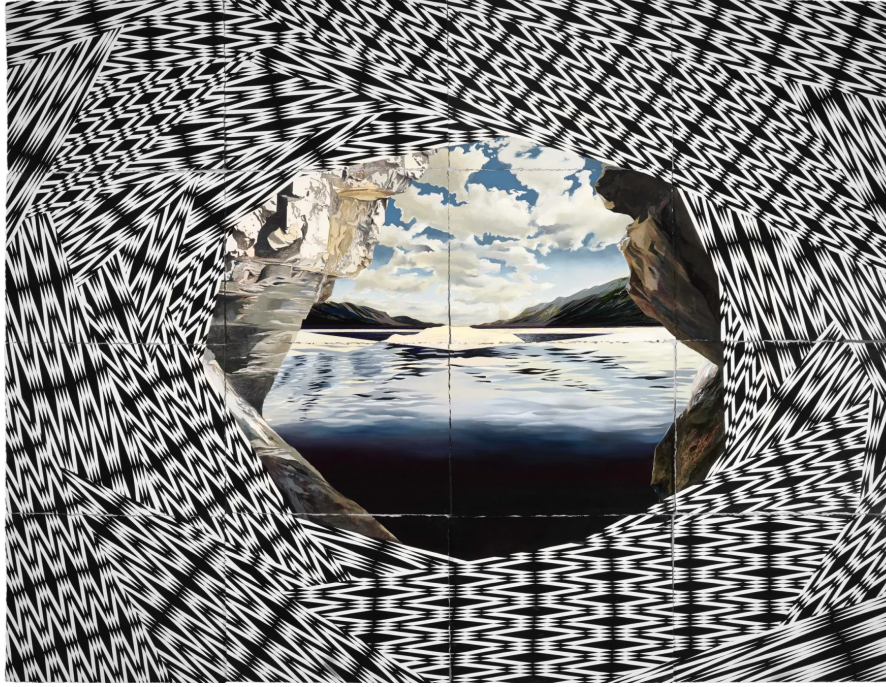


# READER

Andrea Carlson: "Where shore meets horizon"

By Shira Friedman-Parks

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Andrea Carlson (Grand Portage Ojibwe and European descent, born 1979), *The Tempest*, 2008 Credit: © Andrea Carlson

Andrea Carlson: *A Constant Sky* compiles 20 years of the artist's paintings.

Shores make imagining and scrying possible," artist Andrea Carlson wrote for *Fett* magazine in 2018. This fall, her debut monograph, *Andrea Carlson: A Constant Sky*, compiles 20 years of her painting, looking across the horizon. An artistic force to be reckoned with, Carlson works between Chicago and northern Minnesota. Her multipanel, multimediate works compile cannibal film narratives, museum dissonance, and Indigenous Futurisms into vivid, cultural iconography-filled landscapes. She's also a cofounder of Chicago's Center for Native Futures: "within the adversarial context of all that teaches us to desire colonization . . . [it's] one of these soft, joy-filled spaces," she writes.

*Andrea Carlson: A Constant Sky* was published to coincide with the artist's upcoming solo exhibition of the same name at the Denver Art Museum. There, her in-production large-scale painting *The Constant Sky* (2025) will complete the three-part series that began with *Ink Babel* (2014) and *Red Exit* (2020). Each measuring 115 x 183 inches, these intricate landscape-based works mimic the repetition and motion of celluloid filmstrips. "I'm interested in land as an extension of how we organize information and how information moves on a sphere or torus as an infinite space," she writes. "The cells also make it hard to imagine entering the landscape without the viewer being fragmented themselves."

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The book begins by charting Carlson's body of work and media inspirations, working its way up from 2005. Interspersing Carlson's elaborate, colorful complete works and much-appreciated detail shots are essays, poems by Heid E. Erdrich, and an extended conversation between Carlson and curator Dakota Hoska.

Where shore meets horizon is a through line across Carlson's work: a way of imagining past, present, and future converging in space; or, "to gaze and to dream and to daydream," as Nasrin Himada writes. The shoreline is the foundation through which Carlson tells her stories. "In most of my work, the imagery tends to be washed up on its own shore," she writes. "Simply put, it's all Lake Superior to me, but it could be any large body of water." Readers from Chicago may see a familiar horizon, Lake Michigan.



At the Denver Art Museum, Carlson's large-scale painting *The Constant Sky* (2025) will complete the three-part series that began with *Ink Babel* (2014)—seen here—and *Red Exit* (2020).

Credit: © Andrea Carlson, courtesy of the artist and Bockley Gallery, Minneapolis

Beyond negating a plane ticket to Denver, the physical object of the book gets at the materiality of paper in Carlson's work as a whole. Her painted works are created on panels of paper, rather than canvas, where the imperfect edges often poke through. Paper surfaces are intentionally incorporated into works such as *The Tempest* (2008), *Ancestor and Descendant* (2023), and the *VORE* series. "To talk about paper, I must talk about landscape," Carlson writes. "If we consider the political and legal structures of the dispossession of Indigenous people, paper serves a function against us and the land. It provides a thin cover through deeds, bills of sale, maps, and treaties that all describe the land, abstract the land, and provide legal cover for the theft of land."

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In her essay, art journalist Aruna D'Souza lingers on VORE, Carlson's longest-running series. VORE draws upon imagery and language from Italian cannibal exploitation films of the 70s and 80s. In it, Carlson explores the irony of barbarity narratives created about Indigenous people by colonizers and by filmmakers for viewers craving sensationalism from their couch.

Citing Michel Foucault, VORE considers how film rewrites history to impose frameworks on the present, and furthermore, how museums practice a cannibalism of their own. "Museums also have this sickness," Carlson writes. "They are hungry, they often misidentify what they consume, and they assimilate things outside of themselves." In VORE, all pieces share the same horizon line; beside each other, the shore continues towards infinity.

Erdrich recalls stories of the Wiindigo, an insatiable, cannibal creature. "I like to think the girl was the first person to figure out how to slay the monster," she writes. "I like to see similar gambles and tricks at work in Andrea Carlson's paintings and films that say that no matter how hungry you are, you will not eat us. We will eat everything we see and offer it back to you, in exquisitely rendered detail, but you will not eat us in the end."

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