

# Forbes

## "Andrea Carlson Firsts And 'Lastings' Across America"

By Chadd Scott

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Andrea Carlson, 'The Buffet,' 2025. Sumi ink and gouache on paper 46 x 180 inches / 116.8 x 457.2 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman gallery.

Jean M. O'Brien's (b. 1958; White Earth Ojibwe) 2010 book "Firsting and Lasting" investigates how Indigenous people are written out of re-tellings of America's founding. Local histories celebrated the arrivals and founding "firsts" of European settlers while lamenting the disappearance of the original inhabitants—even though Natives still lived in the towns being chronicled.

Indigenous people were memorialized as "lasts" in the manner of "The Last of the Mohicans," spreading the myth of "Native extinction"—a myth persisting in many American minds to this day.

Andrea Carlson (b. 1979; Grand Portage Ojibwe/European descent), a fellow Ojibwe from Minnesota, takes inspiration from O'Brien's book in "The Lasting," her first solo exhibition with Jessica Silverman gallery in San Francisco on view through October 25, 2025.

"The 'first' baby born in some location, the 'first' graveyard, the 'first' settlement, the 'first' this and that—the word 'settler' is missing in these descriptions because settlers are the assumed universal subject," Carlson told Forbes.com. "Indigenous people were doing many of the claimed 'firsts' long before settlers arrived."

Same goes with the notion of "discovery." Rapists and murderers celebrated for "discovering" a continent inhabited by tens of millions of people with advanced cities, languages, cultures, and trade networks.

"Last" proves as ignorant as "first" in dominant settler storytelling of the founding of America.

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"'Lasting' is what O'Brien observes on plaques and monuments about Indigenous people," Carlson explains. "A perpetual state of lamenting the passage of Native people and things while we are standing right next to the settler dreaming up our demise."

Through a conceptual twist, Carlson transforms these last-of-their-kind stories into narratives of long-lasting resilience, honoring the survival and ongoing adaptability of Native people in her artwork.

### 'The Buffet'

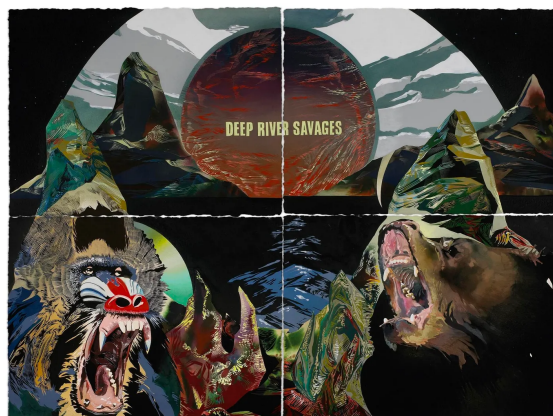
Highlighting the Jessica Silverman gallery show is *The Buffet* (2025)—a sprawling, fifteen-foot-long tableau—depicting a "last supper" with a large floating table at the center, animals hiding underneath seeking protection from a meteor shower, empty baskets and ceramic vessels on the table —no food—and figureless shawls surrounding the buffet. A hungry wolf. A growling bear. The meteors—portraits of real asteroids—have colorful tails with eye-dazzling chevron patterns honoring Ojibwe finger-weaving, a textile technique used to create strong sashes and belts for portage.

"The piece is about those close calls, survival on thin margins, these moments when you might call out a quick prayer, but it isn't the end," Carlson said. "The work will forever be that moment, and the future calamity won't ever arrive. That is because a painting is static. The moment of meteor impact won't ever happen in this landscape."

Our planet, however, is not static. Text on the painting offers a dire warning: "SAVE YOUR EARTH, YOU CAN'T GET OFF."

A dose of reality from an artist, welcome contrast to the childish fantasies of tech bros.

### Andrea Carlson: Nationwide



Andrea Carlson (Grand Portage Ojibwe and European descent, b. 1979), 'Deep River Savages,' 2009–2010. Mixed media on four sheets of heavy wove paper; 45 1/2 x 60 1/2 in. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa: Purchased 2011.

© Andrea Carlson, courtesy of the artist and Bockley Gallery, Minneapolis. Photo courtesy NGC

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Carlson's San Francisco gallery show coincides with solo exhibitions at the Denver Art Museum (October 5, 2025, through February 16, 2026) and the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art in Kansas City (now through February 15, 2026), a remarkable achievement. The Denver show, "Andrea Carlson: A Constant Sky," represents her first museum survey.

Kaleidoscopic and futuristic, often unsettling and confrontational with blunt text, writhing figures, and agitated animals, Carlson paints landscapes of a sort, but not the serene, unpopulated landscapes museum-goers are accustomed to. In stark contrast to Euro-American uses of the landscape genre, Carlson views the imagined space within the work as an inaccessible place of refusal because the viewer can only imagine occupying the depicted land.

Occupying.

"The history of landscape painting is very political," Carlson said. "American landscape painting has a history in propaganda, selling Europeans on an idea of free land for the taking as a 'god-given right' to dominate, farm, and cultivate. The American Dream is the dream of building one's capital onto stolen land. Politically speaking, and from the standpoint of an Indigenous artist making a landscape while fully surrounded by the colonial project, landscape has to be political, there is no way around it."

Nineteenth century American landscape painting was conspicuously devoid of people. Indigenous people. A literal erasure. Removing Native people and their presence from landscape painting created a false impression that the land was free for the taking. Up for grabs. Just sitting there waiting to be claimed.

Yes, those picturesque forests and mountains and waterfalls of the Hudson River School artists and Bierstadt and Moran had political intention and consequences. They were not benign.

The worst of them and their sinister intentions are back in fashion.

"The politics of historic and re-emerging racist policies of Manifest Destiny that we are witnessing in real time is political," Carlson said.

The Department of Homeland Security has turned to long-ago derided artworks promoting white supremacy and Indigenous genocide to populate its social media channels.

For its part, the Denver Art Museum has distinguished itself for 100 years as one of the first museums in the world to collect and display Indigenous art as art-not ethnography-and it's also been a leader that entire time in the collection of contemporary Native American art, placing Native artists and people and culture in the present, not locked in the past.

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"Over the past 100 years, DAM has focused on featuring Indigenous arts as part of diverse, thriving and living cultures," John Lukavic, Andrew W. Mellon Curator of Native Arts at DAM, said. "A Constant Sky' sets the tone for the next 100 years, centering the theme of reclamation and subverting Eurocentric standards."

Carlson recently expanded her practice to include sculpture. The Denver Art Museum commissioned *Columns for a Horizon*, a large-scale sculptural work which consists of individual wooden poles of varying lengths. This sculpture, when placed in front of Carlson's painted works, denies entry into her imagined landscapes and encourages viewers to contemplate ideas of access and denial.

"Refusing physical entry into an implied landscape, something that all landscapes paintings do, is interesting to me," she said. "This also seems to counter the aspect of settler-colonization that celebrates the free presence and movement of settlers with impunity to explore, discover, colonize, and permanently settle in places that are already territorialized by Indigenous people."

## Horizons



Andrea Carlson, 'Unearthed Cannibal,' 2024, oil, acrylic, gouache, ink, color pencil, and graphite on paper, approximately 46x182 inches (overall). Artwork courtesy of the artist © Andrea Carlson.  
Image courtesy The Goldfarb Gallery, 2025. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid.

At the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, "Andrea Carlson: Shimmer on Horizons," finds the artist organizing her landscapes, be they video, painting or sculpture, around one constant: the horizon. This line is reminiscent of her homelands on Lake Superior as well as Chicago, on Lake Michigan, where she has also lived.

"The watered horizon is an abstract place of fear," Carlson explained. "Ships can spill out of that abstract space and the limits of the reach of the eye is very present when looking at the horizon. Horizons, for me, are also a place of futurity because they seem to look like infinity."

Horizons also call back to the politics of landscape painting. They have further served to reinforce art historical tropes depicting vast and vacant territory, ripe for the taking. For colonizing. For settling.

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Carlson's landscapes are not empty, they are densely layered with a range of motifs from colonial tactics to her family and peers, Ojibwe culture, and Indigenous sovereignty.

Self-described as both "nowhere and everywhere," Carlson's imagined scenes do not depict specific places, but rather consider how landscapes are composites of histories, relationships, and power. Grounded in Anishinaabe understandings of space and time, the works in this exhibition reflect on how land carries memories of colonial expansion and violence, as well as Indigenous presence and resistance.

Indigenous presence and resistance.

Carlson's most prominent artwork spoke to both. Her enormous *Bodéwadmikik éthë yéyék/You are on Potawatomi Land* mural displayed alongside the Chicago River downtown between 2021 and 2024 was seen by millions.

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