

"Rose B. Simpson: These 18 Artists Are Having the Biggest Moment at U.S. Museums Right Now"

by Ben Davis

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We are midway through the year, and I have just finished my recurring "Museum Artist" list. Below is my ranking of which living artists got the most attention in U.S. museum shows in June 2026. This time out, I looked at about 350 museums, and found about 3,500 artists on view. Of those, just 720 appeared in more than one museum show during the month.

My rankings of the artists are based on a mix of breadth (presence in a great number of group shows) and depth (solo shows or special museum spotlights). To avoid clutter, I've moved my "Methodology" section—which has changed a bit—to the bottom. It explains the number that appears alongside each artist's name. Basically, it adds up group show appearances, which I count as 1, with larger shows, which I rank from 2 to 6. I include the number for transparency's sake, so you can see how I put this together, rather than out of a pretense at being scientific. The project is fun to do because it gives a sense of which artists are having a moment. But in the end, it's just a way to tell a story.

Museum websites are not always complete or reliable. I am certain that I miss some things. I'll note any updates or corrections right here.

Thoughts on June's List

Some names have risen and fallen since December 2025—but the truth is, much is the same. The big theme of U.S. museum programming remains spotlighting Native and Black artists. Beyond this, the unique focus of summer 2026 is the 250th birthday of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. However, because reckoning with histories of racism and colonialism was already a focus, the main practical effect seems to be to amplify artists whose work was already in heavy rotation. (See the entries, for instance, for Jeffrey Gibson, Sky Hopinka, or Carrie Mae Weems.)

Amusingly, nonagenarian proto-Pop/neo-Dada artist Jasper Johns also seems to get a little bump from the America 250 festivities. He is, at this point, basically part of U.S. history himself. Maybe more importantly: His work is very associated with the American flag.

Another birthday shapes the list: Betye Saar will turn 100 in July. She is widely loved by curators, and is even honored in June at MoMA's Party in the Garden—alongside with Martin Puryear, another storied Black artist who had a uniquely good month.

Artists who *almost* made the cut included Ai Weiwei, Carol Bove, Nick Cave, Einar and Jamex de la Torre, Glenn Ligon, Mickalene Thomas, Dyani White Hawk, Deborah Roberts, Fritz Scholder, and Alison Saar.

Below, the 18 artists I think were having the biggest moment in June.

Rose B. Simpson (13)



Installation view of "Rose B. Simpson: Lexicon" at the de Young Museum, San Francisco. Photo: by Randy Dodson.

The most prominent place to see Simpson right now is at the de Young in San Francisco, which features a large installation of two art cars, the black ceramic *Maria* and the black-on-white *Bosque*. But she is also a presence in buzzy group shows like "Several Eternities in a Day" at the Hammer and "Some American Dreams" at the Fabric Workshop and Museum.

SMALL SHOWS

—"Rose B. Simpson: LEXICON" at Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, August 30, 2025–February 7, 2027

GROUP SHOWS

—"still/emerging: Native American Works on Paper" at Cleveland Museum of Art, February 1–June 7, 2026

—"Some American Dreams" at Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, April 15–June 14, 2026

—"Grounded" at Los Angeles County Museum of Art, September 14, 2025–June 14, 2026

—"Smart to the Core: Wise to Power" at Smart Museum of Art, Chicago, September 23, 2025–July 5, 2026

—"Several Eternities in a Day: Form in the Age of Living Materials" at Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, April 5–August 23, 2026

—"Recognition of Art by Women: In Retrospect" at Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, Florida, March 28–September 27, 2026

—"Native Voices: 75 Years of Creativity" at the Maynard Dixon Museum, Tucson, Arizona, March 4, 2026–October 10, 2026

—"Into the Time Horizon" at Nevada Museum of Art, Reno, November 15, 2025–January 3, 2027

—"Art and Design from 1900 to Now" at Rhode Island School of Design Museum, Providence, June 4, 2022–April 11, 2027
