

**G. Peter Jemison**

*On The Right Path*

*Works: 1982–2023*

November 17, 2023–January 27, 2024

“On the Right Path, Works: 1982–2023,” presents artworks by G. Peter Jemison (Seneca, Heron Clan) made between 1982 and today. Jemison’s output is wide-ranging, and he is celebrated for his paintings, his collages, and his iconic series of drawings on paper bags, each of which are on view at 47 Canal.

After graduating from art school in 1967, Jemison briefly resided in New York City. Here, he participated in notable group shows at Tibor de Nagy (1968), “Contemporary Indian Painting” at the Museum of the American Indian (1971) and “Native North American Art,” curated by artist and curator Lloyd Oxendine (Lumbee) at the Brooklyn Museum (1972). After spending a decade away from New York City, Jemison returned in 1978 to curate the American Indian Community House’s gallery. The Community House has supported New York’s Indigenous communities for over half a century, and its gallery, which closed in 2012, gave breakthrough shows to numerous Native artists.

During subway rides, the artist noticed commuters carrying bags of various sorts, and he began drawing on paper bags, an item typically seen as cheap and discardable. *Coyote and Raven Party* (1982) depicts Coyote and Raven, two great chaos-makers and creators, surrounded by exuberant glitter and abstract doodles. The spirit of these two tricksters infuses this early work, which is made on paper folded to look like a bag. As it developed, the series came to feature some of Jemison’s frankest political statements. *Braves* (1992), a portrait of a Canandaigua school district lacrosse player on a gourmet grocery bag, rebukes the racist imagery used by sports teams across North America, while *Revoke Papal Bulls* (2022), composed on a Fendi bag, calls for the Pope to rescind the Catholic Church’s 1493 papal bulls, which provided the basis for the “Doctrine of Discovery,” and were used to justify Europe’s invasion of the Americas.

Like other Native artists of his generation, Jemison worked to level distinctions between the traditional and the contemporary, a dichotomy, often exploited by white, Euro-American modernists, that serves to position Indigenous creativity in a romanticized past. Playful and inventive, *Second Ave & 11th* (1984), titled after the last place the artist lived in the city, features an abstract design that recalls Iroquois pottery alongside pictures of morning glories and two crows. A section of fencing overlaying a raccoon pelt calls to mind both the pictorial grid and the urban street plan, as well as the maltreatment of animals. The artwork is made on handmade paper, a material embraced by the artist for its texture and uniqueness.

Jemison moved upstate again in 1985 to manage Ganondagan State Historic Site, a cultural center located at the original site of a 17th century Seneca town. He remained in this role for nearly thirty-five years. The move, and his experiences at Ganondagan, prompted a profound reengagement with the

Native community and environment of his ancestral lands. Scenes like the crisp, meditative *Fox Trot* (2001) observe everyday beauty in nature, and give thanks for it.

Landscape, as a modern European genre, has frequently served to promote and reinforce colonial expansion. As a young student, Jemison spent a semester in Siena, Italy, where he studied Renaissance art. His landscapes draw on this training, yet honor the sacredness of land in Indigenous politics—Indigenous life is lived in responsible relation to land, and does not view land as property—while interrogating ongoing processes of dispossession. An acrylic painting on paper, *Onondowagah Territory* (2003) emphasizes the dignity and harmony of the Native environment, and makes the point that Indigenous sovereignty is critical to environmental repair.

Jemison’s output is often inspired by his life experiences—in his work, the autobiographical and the political are intimately linked. For Jemison, this does not serve to privilege the role of the artist, but instead illustrates the interconnectedness of life. His practice is guided by *orenda*, the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) understanding of the spiritual force embodied by all living beings and parts of creation. The philosophy animates artworks ranging from activist collages like *Route 17 Blockade* (1992) to bright, abstract canvases such as *School House* (2012). Like Jemison’s art, *orenda* is rooted in an ethic of reciprocity, and in the wisdom of right relationships with the world around us.

“On the Right Path” is Jemison’s first solo exhibition in New York City since 1974, when he showed at American Art, a gallery founded on Wooster Street in the early 1970s by Oxendine. In September of this year, he presented work in the Focus section of the Armory Show, curated by Candice Hopkins (Carcross/Tagish). Jemison recently participated in the group exhibitions “Just Above Midtown: Changing Spaces” at the Museum of Modern Art (2022), “Greater New York” at MoMA PS1 (2021), and “Unholding” at Artists Space (2017).

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**G. Peter Jemison** (Seneca Nation of Indians, Heron Clan, b. 1945) lives and works in Victor, New York. Recent solo and two-person exhibitions include: K Art Gallery, Buffalo (2023, 2021); Burchfield Penny Arts Center, Buffalo (2022); Memorial Art Gallery, Rochester (2021), and IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, Santa Fe (2020). In the last year, his work has featured in “The House Edge,” curated by Caitlin Chaisson, The 8th Floor, New York and “The Land Carries Our Ancestors: Contemporary Art by Native Americans,” curated by Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (Salish-Kootenai), National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.. Additional group exhibitions include: Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin (2013); Museum of Arts and Design, New York (2012); Institute of American Indian Arts Museum Contemporary Native Art, New Mexico (2006); Museum der Weltkultern Frankfurt am Main, Germany (2003); The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (1990); the Studio Museum of Harlem, New York (1990); Artists Space, New York (1988); and Just Above Midtown Gallery, New York (1981) among others.

Public collections that have acquired Jemison’s work include the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Buffalo AKG Art Museum, Buffalo; Heard Museum, Phoenix; Institute of American Indian Arts Museum, Santa Fe; Denver Art Museum, Denver; British Museum, London; and Museum der Weltkultern, Frankfurt.

A leading authority on the subject of Haudenosaunee history, Jemison co-edited *Treaty of Canandaigua 1794: 200 Years of Treaty Relations between the Iroquois Confederacy and the United States* (Clear Light, 2000). He writes frequently on the repatriation of sacred objects, cultural patrimony, and the human remains of the Haudenosaunee.

Jemison was founding director of the American Indian Community House Gallery in New York from 1978 to 1985, and was Historic Site Manager at Ganondagan in Victor, New York from 1985 until his retirement in 2022. In addition, Jemison is a Seneca Faithkeeper, served as the Indian Tribes representative on the Federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation during the administration of President George W. Bush, acts as the Seneca Nation representative for the Native American Graves, Protection and Repatriation Act committee, and is a trustee for the National Museum of the American Indian.