Fall 2022–Fall 2023

# Jeffrey Gibson:
# THE SPIRITS ARE LAUGHING

Aspen Art Museum

Interior images: Jeffrey Gibson, **THE SPIRITS ARE LAUGHING**, 2022. Video still. Courtesy the artist, Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York; Kavi Gupta Gallery, Chicago; Roberts Projects, Los Angeles; and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London. Photo: Brett Novak

Jeffrey Gibson's practice mixes Indigenous aesthetic histories with the visual language of Modernism to explore culture, history, and identity. The artist works with garments, sculpture, performance, video, and painting to consider the complex and fluid narratives surrounding selfhood in this country. Gibson uses his surroundings as sources, mixing references from contemporary politics with pop culture and queer iconography to create unexpected connections within his world.

The exhibition and related performance Jeffrey Gibson: THE SPIRITS ARE LAUGHING evolves out of conversations around Indigenous kinship philosophy—the practice of engaging with the land as an extension of one's own family or oneself, and looking at everything in our surroundings as an equal living entity. A member of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and of Cherokee descent, Gibson's THE SPIRITS ARE LAUGHING both acknowledges and embraces these perspectives.

The artist presents an assemblage of anthropomorphized sculptural heads that incorporate stones, fossils, and other natural materials, representing the passage of geologic and natural time on the Aspen Art Museum rooftop. These are shown in dialogue with a grouping of Gibson's signature bright flags, each with a different pattern, text, lyric, or slogan.

In the galleries, Gibson presents a corresponding video filmed on site in the Aspen landscape that features a group of 15 flag spinners performing and speaking to the land. Performers from the Denver area with a background in colorguard gathered in Aspen in the summer of 2022, creating choreography paired with song lyrics by Velsum. The songs praise the land we share, acknowledging the sun, the water, the trees, the mountains, the animals, and the moon and stars. THE SPIRITS ARE LAUGHING invites viewers to immerse themselves in the mountainous landscape of the Roaring Fork Valley, and honor natural elements that nourish and enrich our lives.

Performers featured in THE SPIRITS ARE LAUGHING include Danya Ahram, Leo Balcer, Katie Cox, Donna Daugherty, Natalie Harris, Madi Miller, Serenity Monroe, Nazhoné Morgan, Madeline Morales, Emily Nunemaker, Omar Pena, Elijah Sena, Rosie Small Farley, Megan Templeton, and Ryan Vela.

Jeffrey Gibson's work fuses his Choctaw-Cherokee heritage and experience of living in Europe, Asia, and the US with references that span club culture, queer theory, fashion, politics, literature, and art history. His multifaceted practice incorporates painting, performance, sculpture, textiles, and video, and is characterized by vibrant color and pattern. His work can be found in the numerous public and private collections including the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Denver Art Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Crystal Bridges Museum, and the Wellin Museum, among others. Gibson is the recipient of numerous awards, notably a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship (2019), Joan Mitchell Foundation, Painters and Sculptors Grant (2015), and Creative Capital Award (2005). He is represented by Sikkema Jenkins & Co in NYC, Kavi Gupta in Chicago, Roberts Projects in Los Angeles, and Stephen Friedman Gallery in London. Gibson was born in 1972, Colorado, and currently lives and works in the Hudson Valley, New York.

**LIST OF WORKS**

Rooftop

**The Dreamer**, 2022
Amethyst inset in welded steel and brazed copper
42 × 33 × 32 in (107 × 84 × 81 cm)

**No Simple Word for Time**, 2022
Mixed semi precious stones and geologic specimens inset in welded steel
41 × 29 × 29 1/2 in (104 × 73.5 × 75 cm)

**Love Unconditionally**, 2022
Pink quartz and amethyst inset in steel and brazed copper
43 × 33 × 33 (109.25 × 84 × 84 cm)

**FIRE TEACH ME TO BURN BABY BURN**, 2022
Water-based ink on polyester duck, nylon thread, grommets, aluminum pole, aluminum flagpole ball, acrylic paint
96 × 60 in (243.85 × 152.4 cm)

**POWER**, 2022
Water-based ink on polyester duck, nylon thread, grommets, aluminum pole, aluminum flagpole ball, acrylic paint
96 × 60 in (243.85 × 152.4 cm)

**A QUESTION OF TIME**, 2022
Water-based ink on polyester duck, nylon thread, grommets, aluminum pole, aluminum flagpole ball, acrylic paint
96 × 60 in (243.85 × 152.4 cm)

**THE SPIRITS ARE LAUGHING**, 2022
Water-based ink on polyester duck, nylon thread, grommets, aluminum pole, aluminum flagpole ball, acrylic paint
60 × 96 in (152.4 × 243.85 cm)

**WATER FLOW THROUGH ME**, 2022
Water-based ink on polyester duck, nylon thread, grommets, aluminum pole, aluminum flagpole ball, acrylic paint
96 × 60 in (243.85 × 152.4 cm)

**THE ONLY WAY OUT IS THROUGH**, 2022
Water-based ink on polyester duck, nylon thread, grommets, aluminum pole, aluminum flagpole ball, acrylic paint
96 × 60 in (243.85 × 152.4 cm)

**RESPECT INDIGENOUS LAND**, 2022
Water-based ink on polyester duck, nylon thread, grommets, aluminum pole, aluminum flagpole ball, acrylic paint
96 × 60 in (243.85 × 152.4 cm)

**CLEAN AIR TO BREATHE CLEAN AIR TO LIVE**, 2022
Water-based ink on polyester duck, nylon thread, grommets, aluminum pole, aluminum flagpole ball, acrylic paint
96 × 60 in (243.85 × 152.4 cm)

**SPEAK TO YOUR ANCESTORS**, 2022
Water-based ink on polyester duck, nylon thread, grommets, aluminum pole, aluminum flagpole ball, acrylic paint
96 × 60 in (243.85 × 152.4 cm)

**THE TREES ARE WITNESSES**, 2022
Water-based ink on polyester duck, nylon thread, grommets, aluminum pole, aluminum flagpole ball, acrylic paint
96 × 60 in (243.85 × 152.4 cm)

**THE LAND IS SPEAKING ARE YOU LISTENING**, 2022
Water-based ink on polyester duck, nylon thread, grommets, aluminum pole, aluminum flagpole ball, acrylic paint
96 × 60 in (243.85 × 152.4 cm)

**TIME IS GOOD MEDICINE**, 2022
Water-based ink on polyester duck, nylon thread, grommets, aluminum pole, aluminum flagpole ball, acrylic paint
96 × 60 in (243.85 × 152.4 cm)

**THE SUN SHINES LOVE**, 2022
Water-based ink on polyester duck, nylon thread, grommets, aluminum pole, aluminum flagpole ball, acrylic paint
96 × 60 in (243.85 × 152.4 cm)

**HONOR OUR FOUR LEGGED KIN**, 2022
Water-based ink on polyester duck, nylon thread, grommets, aluminum pole, aluminum flagpole ball, acrylic paint
96 × 60 in (243.85 × 152.4 cm)

**MY BODY IS YOUR BODY IS OUR BODY**, 2022
Water-based ink on polyester duck, nylon thread, grommets, aluminum pole, aluminum flagpole ball, acrylic paint
96 × 60 in (243.85 × 152.4 cm)

Gallery 6

**THE SPIRITS ARE LAUGHING**, 2022
Video, 27:08 min. Cinematography: Brett Novak

**THE SPIRITS ARE LAUGHING Helmet 1**, 2022
Found metal cans, pop rivets, glass beads, metal wire
21 1/8 × 12 1/4 × 12 3/4 in (53.5 × 31 × 32 cm)

**THE SPIRITS ARE LAUGHING Helmet 2**, 2022
Found metal cans, pop rivets, glass beads, metal wire
17 1/2 × 10 × 10 1/4 in (44.5 × 25.5 × 26 cm)

**THE SPIRITS ARE LAUGHING Helmet 3**, 2022
Found metal cans, pop rivets, glass beads, metal wire
20 1/4 × 11 1/2 × 10 1/4 in (51.4 × 29.2 × 26 cm)

**THE SPIRITS ARE LAUGHING Helmet 4**, 2022
Found metal cans, pop rivets, glass beads, metal wire
16 1/2 × 12 3/8 × 13 in (42 × 31.5 × 33 cm)

**THE SPIRITS ARE LAUGHING Helmet 5**, 2022
Found metal cans, pop rivets, glass beads, metal wire
19 × 11 1/4 × 10 1/4 in (48.25 × 28.5 × 26 cm)

**THE SPIRITS ARE LAUGHING Helmet 6**, 2022
Found metal cans, pop rivets, glass beads, metal wire
16 3/4 × 13 × 12 1/2 in (42.5 × 33 × 34.3 cm)

**THE SPIRITS ARE LAUGHING Helmet 7**, 2022
Found metal cans, pop rivets, glass beads, metal wire
19 1/2 × 12 7/8 × 13 1/4 in (49.5 × 32.75 × 33.66 cm)

**THE SPIRITS ARE LAUGHING Helmet 8**, 2022
Found metal cans, pop rivets, glass beads, metal wire
21 1/4 × 13 × 11 1/2 in (54 × 33 × 29.2 cm)

**THE SPIRITS ARE LAUGHING Helmet 9**, 2022
Found metal cans, pop rivets, glass beads, metal wire
22 1/2 × 12 1/4 × 14 3/4 in (57 × 31 × 37.5 cm)

**THE SPIRITS ARE LAUGHING Helmet 10**, 2022
Found metal cans, pop rivets, glass beads, metal wire
8 1/4 × 10 1/4 × 10 1/4 in (21 × 26 × 26 cm)

**THE SPIRITS ARE LAUGHING Helmet 11**, 2022
Found metal cans, pop rivets, glass beads, metal wire
9 × 9 × 8 3/4 in (23 × 23 × 22.25 cm)

**THE SPIRITS ARE LAUGHING Helmet 12**, 2022
Found metal cans, pop rivets, glass beads, metal wire
12 7/8 × 14 1/4 × 10 1/4 in (32.75 × 36 × 26 cm)

**THE SPIRITS ARE LAUGHING Helmet 13**, 2022
Found metal cans, pop rivets, glass beads, metal wire
12 1/2 × 13 1/4 × 10 7/8 in (31.75 × 31 × 27.5 cm)

**THE SPIRITS ARE LAUGHING Helmet 14**, 2022
Found metal cans, pop rivets, glass beads, metal wire, glass beads
19 × 10 3/4 × 10 3/4 in (48 × 27 × 27 cm)

**THE SPIRITS ARE LAUGHING Helmet 15**, 2022
Found metal cans, pop rivets, glass beads, metal wire
19 1/2 × 13 1/2 × 10 1/4 in (49.5 × 34 × 26 cm)

All works courtesy the artist.

THE
SPIRITS
ARE
LAUGHING

## THE SUN SONG

The Sun will light our way
To the birth of infinity.
As it loves it will live the earth,
A selfless invitation to rebirth.

The Sun will light our way!
The Sun!
The Sun will light our way!
The Sun!

The Sun, as the deed truth,
Is living in our hearts as eternal proof,
That the Earth is a reborn star,
Awakening the spirit in us all.

The Sun will light our way!
The Sun!
The Sun will light our way!
The Sun!

The Sun will spread no lies,
For everything it looks upon comes
to light.
And even the Moon as the harbinger
of night
Is reminder that
the sun will never leave our side.

The Sun will light our way!
The Sun!
The Sun will light our way!
The Sun!

## THE TREE SONG

All you beautiful trees standing tall.
Symphony of singing leaves
Beckoning the seasons' changing.

Tree spirits come to play!
Tell us of the story of connectivity!
Tree spirits sing from your roots!
Share with us the saga of the soil's brew.

Wizened hug of weathered bark
Honoring life within.
Your relationship of Love
Is a ritual of living.

Tree spirits come to play!
Tell us of the story of connectivity!
Tree spirits sing from your roots!
Share with us the saga of the soil's brew.

## THE MOUNTAIN SONG

Mountains!
Mountains!
Ancient bones of Earth Divine.
Mountains!
Mountains!
Patient dance of primordial time.

Teach us of your gradient,
Oh, painting of the climate!
Teach us of the nutrients
From above the clouds to Earth's
crypt.

Mountains! Mountains!
Oah!
Mountains! Mountains!
Oah!

Mountains!
Mountains!
Memories of molten Sun.
Mountains!
Mountains!
Beacons laden rivers of Love.

Teach us how you've incarnated
From fluid to hard rock.
Teach us how this incarnation's
Wisdom is not yet lost!

Mountains! Mountains!
Oah!
Mountains! Mountains!
Oah!

Mountains!
Mountains!
Shamans of the crystal light
Mountains!
Mountains!
Silent bearers of reverent might.

Teach us how you honor
All the beings who upon you live.
Teach us how you remember
All the lives who have become your
skin.

Mountains! Mountains!
Oah!
Mountains! Mountains!
Oah!

## SONGS

**Written by Velsum**

**Singers: Danya Ahram, Leo Balcer, Katie Cox, Donna Daugherty, Natalie Harris, Madi Miller, Serenity Monroe, Nazhoné Morgan, Madeline Morales, Emily Nunemaker, Omar Pena, Elijah Sena, Rosie Small Farley, Megan Templeton, and Ryan Vela.**

## THE WATER SONG

The water remembers;
Listen to the story.
The water remembers;
River, take me to the sea.

River flow, river flow, river flow.
You are the lifeblood of all creation.
River flow, river flow, river flow.
Teach us the wisdom of imagination.

The water remembers;
Listen to the story.
The water remembers;
River, take me to the sea.

Ocean rise, ocean fall, ocean rise!
You are the heart beat! You are
the beginning!
Ocean rise, ocean fall, ocean rise!
Teach us the rhythm of the song
that you're singing!

The water remembers;
Listen to the story.
The water remembers;
River, take me to the sea.

Lake and stream, ice and steam,
sweat and tears,
You are the past, you are the
present and future.
Lake and stream, ice and steam,
sweat and tears,
Teach us the way of the shout
and the whisper.

The water remembers;
Listen to the story.
The water remembers;
River, take me to the sea.
Take me to the sea.
Take me to the sea.

## THE ANIMAL SONG

Wing and tail, feather and fin,
We honor you and all of your kin.
Relatives of the earth and sea,
Remind us how we can truly be free.

There are so many ways to live here.
There are so many ways to be;
On the earth, in the air, under water,
Let us share in the bounty!

Wing and tail, feather and fin,
We honor you and all of your kin.
Relatives of the earth and sea,
Remind us how we can truly be free.

If you listen, the birds will tell you
All the mysteries of the sky.
And the songs that they sing
Have their own set of wings to fly.

Wing and tail, feather and fin,
We honor you and all of your kin.
Relatives of the earth and sea,
Remind us how we can truly be free.

Look down and the ants will show you
How to build a community.
When we all do our share
Then the whole becomes a harmony.

Wing and tail, feather and fin,
We honor you and all of your kin.
Relatives of the earth and sea,
Remind us how we can truly be free.

There's a world inside our waters.
There's a wisdom we will never know.
Thank you shell, thank you fin,
Thank you all who dwell within the flow.

Wing and tail, feather and fin,
We honor you and all of your kin.
Relatives of the earth and sea,
Remind us how we can truly be free.

All our cousins who live among us,
With your four legs on the earth,
You teach us how to balance
And to dance as the planet turns.

Wing and tail, feather and fin,
We honor you and all of your kin.
Relatives of the earth and sea,
Remind us how we can truly be free.

## MOON AND STARS SONG

Moon wax and moon wane;
Every seed is born of dark.
Starlight will guide our way;
Every fire was once a spark.

Night falls, the sky speaks
In a language old as time.
Stars, shine your light in me
Show me wisdom, show me rhyme.

Moon wax and moon wane;
Every seed is born of dark.
Starlight will guide our way;
Every fire was once a spark.

Feel how the moon moves
Out of death into rebirth,
Then carves the light away;
Round and round the wheel turns.

Moon wax and moon wane;
Every seed is born of dark.
Starlight will guide our way;
Every fire was once a spark.

Star, with your fire eyes,
Please remind me who I am.
Moon, dance across the sky
In your silver caravan.

Moon wax and moon wane;
Every seed is born of dark.
Starlight will guide our way;
Every fire was once a spark.

Moon wax and moon wane;
Every seed is born of dark.
Starlight will guide our way;
Every fire was once a spark.

CLEAN
AIR
TO BREATHE
CLEAN
AIR
TO LIVE

## ABOUT THE ASPEN ART MUSEUM

Accredited by the American Alliance of Museums in 1979, the Aspen Art Museum is a thriving and globally engaged non-collecting contemporary art museum. Following the 2014 opening of the museum's facility designed by Pritzker Prize–winning architect Shigeru Ban, the AAM enjoys increased attendance, renewed civic interaction, and international media attention. In July 2017, the AAM was one of ten institutions to receive the United States' National Medal for Museum and Library Services for its educational outreach to rural communities in Colorado's Roaring Fork Valley and its fostering of learning partnerships with civic and cultural partners within a 100-mile radius of the museum's Aspen location.

Aspen Art Museum
637 East Hyman Avenue
Aspen, Colorado 81611

aspenartmuseum.org
(970) 925-8050

Hours
Tuesday–Sunday, 10 AM–6 PM
Closed Mondays

Admission to the AAM is free courtesy of Amy and John Phelan.

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