

FORBES > LIFESTYLE > ARTS

Exhibition Of Indian Space Painters At Crystal Bridges Museum Of American Art

Chadd Scott Contributor @

I cover the intersection of art and travel.

Follow

May 7, 2024, 03:38pm EDT



"Space Makers: Indigenous Expression and a New American Art" installation view at the Crystal ... [1] CHADD SCOTT

The Indian Space Painters were not Indians. They were a short-lived group of white painters working in New York in the late 1940s. They were, however, influenced by Native American cultural heritage in their attempt to create a "new American art" untethered from European precedents.

"Indian Space" was flat in perspective. The group's paintings were further identified by all-over compositions borrowing ideas of abstract design from Pueblo pottery, Navajo weavings, and garments from the peoples indigenous to the Northwest Coast as three examples. The Indian Space Painters were familiar with these patterns from textbooks and museum visits, prominently New York's American Museum of Natural History.

"Indian space showed me the way of merging (Indigenous) and Western art together," Indian Space Painters member Will Barnet (1911–2012) explained of the movement. "It took me beyond Cubism in a search for American values."

PROMOTED

Sponsored Content

Vanguard's 3 Steps To Maximizing Your Medicare Coverage

Click Here

9 Ways To Get Money Without Getting A Job

FinanceBuzz

World Renowned Expert: Sell These Stocks Today

Altimetry

Coming from a place of cultural reverence, not cultural appropriation, the Indian Space Painters' brief existence and lasting influence is examined for the first time by the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, AR during the exhibition "Space Makers: Indigenous Expression and a New American Art," on view through September 30, 2024.

"No one's ever heard of this and that was one of the reasons we felt it was an opportunity to go for it and try to figure out a way to tell this story in a way that is relevant and appropriate to deeper cultural understanding," Crystal Bridges Chief Curator Austen Barron Bailly told Forbes.com. "They're extraordinary examples of modern American art people haven't seen, a real achievement worth recognizing, but not in isolation."

MORE FOR YOU

'Fallout' Dethroned In Amazon Prime Video's Top 10 List By A New Offering

Trump Accepts Biden's Challenge To Debate Twice Starting Next Month

Core Inflation Hit 3 Year Low In April But Remains Well Above Historic Target

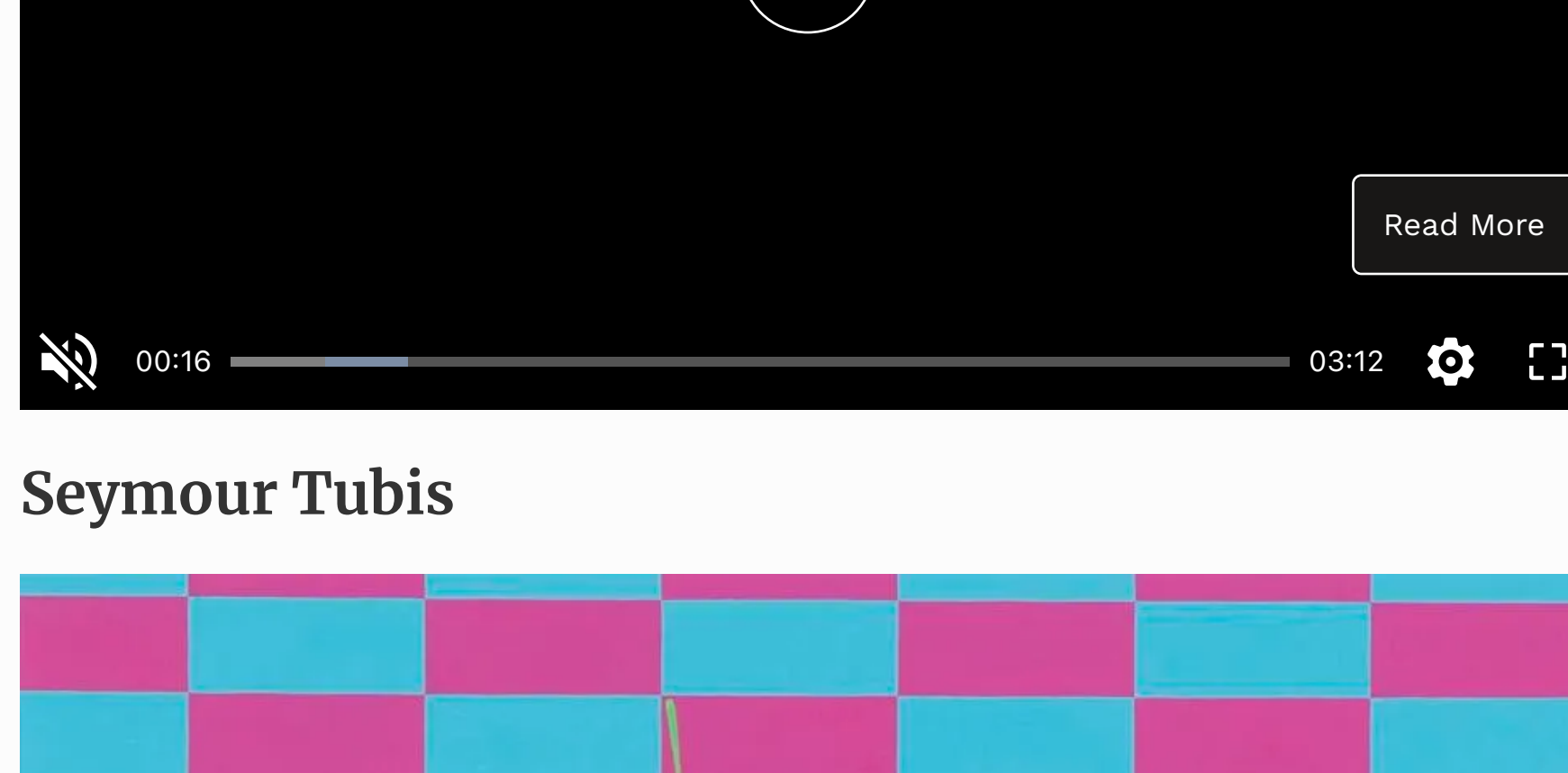
"Space Makers" shows off premier examples from the Indian Space Painters alongside historic items produced by Native Americans—the continent's first abstract artists—and contemporary Native American art. What emerges is a surprising, but undeniable web of relationships leading from the Art Students League in New York to the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, a network only now being recognized for its foundational influence on modern and contemporary art in America.

Passport: Explore the finest destinations and experiences around the world in the Forbes Passport newsletter.

Email address Sign Up

By signing up, you agree to receive this newsletter, other updates about Forbes and its affiliates' offerings, our Terms of Service (including mailing list opt-out on an individual basis via unsubscribe), and you acknowledge our Privacy Statement. Forbes is protected by reCAPTCHA, and the Google Privacy Policy and Terms of Service apply.

At the center of that web was [Seymour Tubis](#) (1919–1993).



Seymour Tubis



Benjamin Harjo, Jr., "Honoring the Spirit of All Things," 2021, Opague watercolor 39 3/4 in. x 27 ... [1] ON LOAN FROM OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY MUSEUM OF ART, STILLWATER, OKLAHOMA

During the first half of the 20th century, The Art Students League in New York was [the preeminent art school in the country](#) with a roster of students and instructors including Norman Rockwell, Georgia O'Keeffe, Jackson Pollock, [Alexander Calder](#), and Mark Rothko.

And [Seymour Tubis](#), who studied there following his service in World War II and taught there throughout the 1950s. His study and instruction coincided with the Indian Space Painters, students and teachers at the school like Barnet, who taught there from the 30s through the 70s.

In 1963, Tubis took his vast knowledge of Modern art and went west to the newly created [Institute of American Indian Arts](#) in Santa Fe, NM. Founded in 1962, IAIA has always centered the creation of contemporary Native American art.

"The future of Indian art lies in the future, not the past," longtime IAIA Director [Lloyd Kiva New](#) (Cherokee; 1916–2002) famously said.

New encouraged students to draw from their cultural heritage when creating, but not be beholden to customary ways of making.

Who better to help students put this mandate into practice than Tubis, an Easterner trained in New York and Philadelphia and Paris and Florence with a reverence for Indigenous art and culture who'd already studied with and instructed scores of the nation's leading modern artists. Tubis taught painting and design at IAIA from 1963 to 1980 and is the critical link in the chain connecting early 20th century Modern art in America, New York, and The Art Students League, with IAIA and the [stunning success it would have](#) in shaping contemporary Native art.

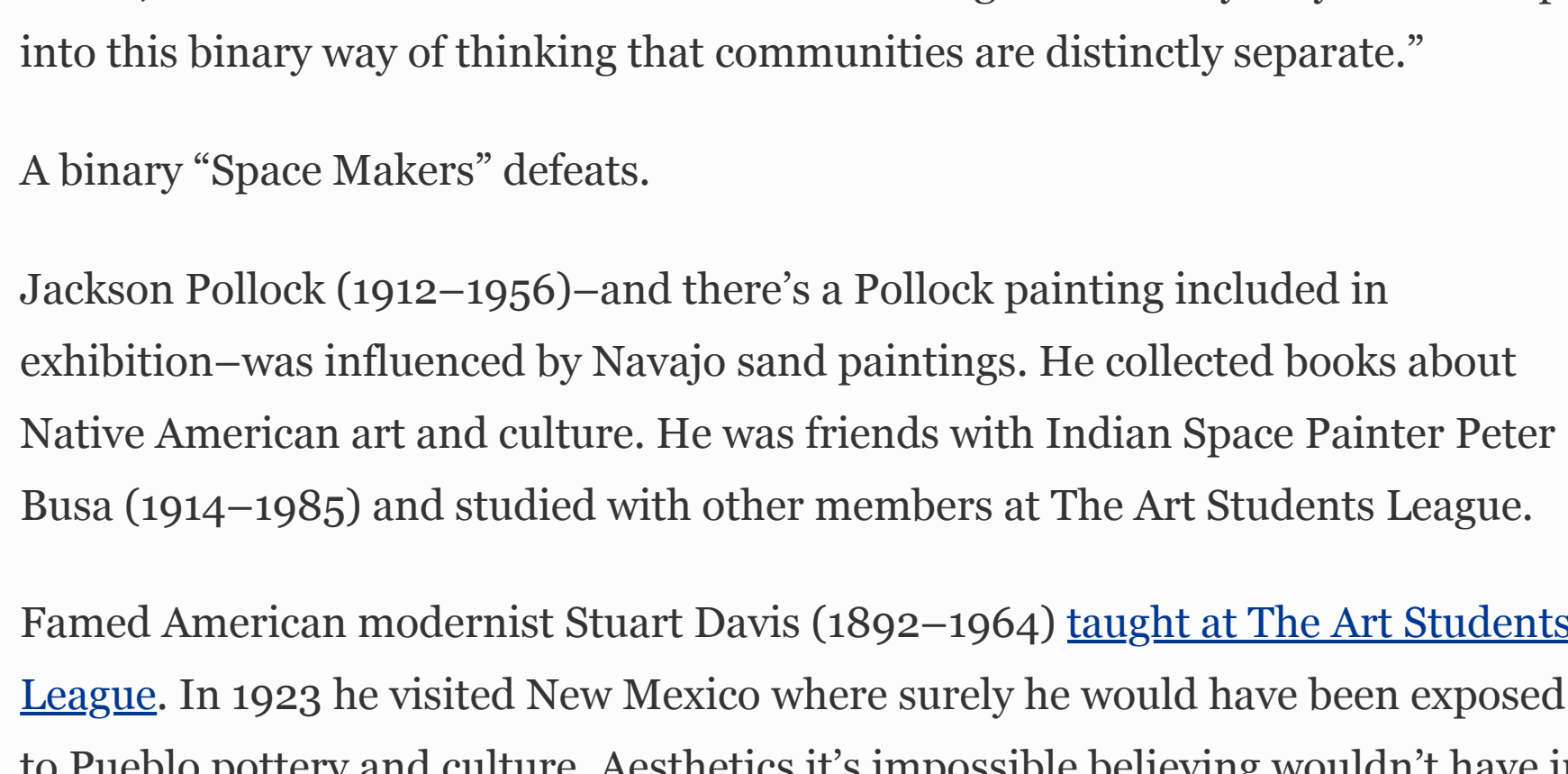
That success came almost immediately from artists like T.C. Cannon (Kiowa/Caddo; 1946–1978) and Linda Lomahaftewa (Hopi/Choctaw; b. 1947)—two of the school's first students. Its prominence continues through today with the likes of Cara Romero (Chemehuevi; b. 1977) and [Rose B. Simpson](#) (Santa Clara Pueblo; b. 1983), two of the most in-demand contemporary artists in the world.

Lomahaftewa was a student at IAIA while Tubis was teaching there and would go on to serve with him at the school later in life. [Benjamin Harjo Jr.](#) (Absentee Shawnee and Seminole; 1945-2023) took classes from Tubis. Both have strikingly contemporary artwork rooted in Indigenous cultural heritage on view in "Space Makers."

"From my read of Ben Harjo's work in particular, (Tubis) did push his attention to what are those aesthetics of your Indigenous heritage, and how might that enter this conversation around modernism," Jordan Poorman Cocker (Kiowa), curator of Indigenous art at Crystal Bridges, told Forbes.com. "I see that presence. You see Seminole patchwork coming through and we see pottery from the southeast coming through, and it's figurative, but it's also this comment about historical works produced in the late 1800s."

Tubis' role as an important mentor to IAIA students and how his teachings profoundly influenced and shaped the experimental environment of the school can't be overestimated.

Both/And, Not Either/Or



"Space Makers: Indigenous Expression and a New American Art" installation view at the Crystal ... [1] CHADD SCOTT

In contrast to IAIA's most famed early instructors, Fritz Scholder, Allan Houser, and Charles Loloma—arguably the greatest Native American painter, sculptor, and jewelry maker of all time—Tubis was white.

"Seymour Tubis is an outlier as an instructor, but I think in the best way, and his influence is certainly felt," Poorman Cocker said. "People get into the trap of creating this false dichotomy between Indigenous artists and non-Indigenous artists, and there's this hard line drawn. Something that is really easy to do is slip into this binary way of thinking that communities are distinctly separate."

A binary "Space Makers" defeats.

Jackson Pollock (1912–1956)—and there's a Pollock painting included in exhibition—was influenced by Navajo sand paintings. He collected books about Native American art and culture. He was friends with Indian Space Painter Peter Busa (1914–1985) and studied with other members at The Art Students League.

Famed American modernist Stuart Davis (1892–1964) [taught at The Art Students League](#). In 1923 he visited New Mexico where surely he would have been exposed to Pueblo pottery and culture. Aesthetics it's impossible believing wouldn't have in some way been passed on to his students who included Pollock, Busa, and Barnet. Davis was a major influence on the Indian Space Painters.

On the other end, Cannon was influenced by Van Gogh, and New, along with the other Native instructors at IAIA, encouraged their students to familiarize themselves and incorporate Modern art methods from Europe and the East Coast.

Busa and [George Morrison](#) (Ojibwe; 1919–2008)—the most accomplished Native Abstract Expressionist painter—were friends who connected through The Art Students League. Morrison studied with Barnet. Morrison's artmaking confounds simple categorization as "Native" as profoundly as any.

Lomahaftewa, who advised on the exhibition in addition to having work on view, taught at IAIA from the mid-70s through 2017.

Will Barnet to Seymour Tubis to Linda Lomahaftewa, nearly a century of artistic transfer connecting The Art Students League with the Institute of American Indian Arts, an endless sphere of influence touching hundreds of leading American artists—Native and non-Native—along the way.

"It's important to acknowledge how critical it is that we understand the influence of these schools, of these teachers, of these artists, on American art writ large," Bailly said. "There are incredible, fertile ways of understanding—new ways of understanding—American art because these connections haven't been identified and articulated as explicitly (as in 'Space Makers')."

Follow me on [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#). Check out my [website](#).

Chadd Scott

Follow

I still remember visiting the Prado museum in Madrid. What I knew about art prior to that read would comfortably fit on the end of a paint brush. My life would be changed that... [Read More](#)

Editorial Standards | Print | Reprints & Permissions

RELATED TOPICS

- 01. ABANDONED HOMES FOR SALE IN DETROIT >
- 02. MANSIONS IN DETROIT >
- 03. MUSEUM OF ART >
- 04. LIST OF MUSEUMS >
- 05. JIM CRAMER'S TOP 10 STOCK PICKS >
- 06. THINGS TO DO IN DETROIT >
- 07. TOP 10 RESTAURANTS IN DETROIT >
- 08. BEST ART COLLECTIONS >

SEE ALSO

Join The Conversation

Comments 0

One Community. Many Voices. Create a free account to share your thoughts. Read our community guidelines [here](#).

Log In

Be the first to comment...

No one seems to have shared their thoughts on this topic yet. Leave a comment so your voice will be heard first.

Capital One

Commercial solutions you can bank on

Vrbo

Private Vacation Rentals

Book now

State Farm

Save an average of \$554 on car insurance*

Get a quote

*Average annual per household savings based on a 2022 national survey by State Farm of new policyholders who reported savings by switching to State Farm.

Vrbo

Book Now

Whenever you're ready to travel, we'll be here. Please follow local travel and safety guidelines.

Save up to 30% with Drive Safe & Save™

Get a quote

Save up to 30% with Drive Safe & Save™

Get a quote

Vrbo

Be the group trip MVP.

Book now