

Museums & Institutions

## These 18 Artists Are Having the Biggest Moment at U.S. Museums Right Now

They include Betye Saar, Jeffrey Gibson, and—just in time for America 250—Jasper Johns.

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.

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# Tanya Leighton

## 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 was even honored in early June at **MoMA's** Party in the Garden—alongside **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.

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# Tanya Leighton

## Sky Hopinka (21)



Installation view, "Sky Hopinka: Red Metal Dust" 2026. Photo: © Barnes Foundation.

Known for his experimental and lyrical work exploring Native American history and life, the filmmaker is having a huge month, thanks in part to *Red Metal Dust* at the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia. This is a new commission for its Annenberg Court of large landscape photographs on copper, meant as the institution's reflection on U.S. history for America 250.

(Hopinka was also one of the major global Biennial Artists I found when I looked at who was showing in major international biennials.)

# Tanya Leighton

## SPECIAL COMMISSIONS

—“Red Metal Dust” at Barnes Collection, Philadelphia, March 21, 2026–January 18, 2027

## SMALL SHOWS

—“Sky Hopinka: The Myth Is Now” at Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland, January 30–August 2, 2026

—“Sky Hopinka: Kicking the Clouds” at National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., April 11–December 6, 2026

## SPOTLIGHTS

—“Sky Hopinka: Lore” at Utah Museum of Contemporary Art, Salt Lake City, Utah, February 27–June 6, 2026

## GROUP SHOWS

—“Sites of Assembly” at Patricia & Phillip Frost Art Museum, Miami, June 6–August 2, 2026

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

—“Topographies: Mapping Being and Belonging” at Des Moines Art Center, Iowa, June 13–September 20, 2026

—“Indian Theater: Native Performance, Art, and Self-Determination since 1969” at SITE Santa Fe, New Mexico. June 5–September 7, 2026

—“An Indigenous Present” at Frist Museum, Nashville, Tennessee, June 26–September 27, 2026

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