

# MASS MoCA

## Jeffrey Gibson: *POWER FULL BECAUSE WE'RE DIFFERENT*

On View November 3, 2024 – Winter 2026  
Building 5 Gallery

*Opening Preview Reception November 2, 5:30pm*

**North Adams, September 4, 2024** — Jeffrey Gibson's *POWER FULL BECAUSE WE'RE DIFFERENT* is a newly commissioned immersive installation that will occupy MASS MoCA's signature Building 5 gallery and follows Gibson's highly celebrated United States representation at the 60th edition of La Biennale di Venezia. Gibson is known for creating installations, performances, paintings, and sculpture that elevate and provide visibility to queer and Indigenous communities, whose cultural narratives have been historically marginalized. Throughout the run of the exhibition, the project will host a series of performances by Indigenous creatives from across North America and was organized by MASS MoCA Chief Curator Denise Markonish.

"We are thrilled to have Jeffrey return to MASS MoCA to accompany the creation of this inspiring new work," said Markonish. "Our first opportunity to collaborate was the 2019 group exhibition *Suffering From Realness*, which explored the fluidity of personal identity and the politics of representation. Spending time together throughout that process provided fertile ground to inspire even bigger dreams, which are now realized as *POWER FULL BECAUSE WE'RE DIFFERENT*. This installation is not only a testament to Jeffrey as an artist, but also as a collaborator and community builder as it will highlight more than three dozen Indigenous creatives from North America."

Gibson views the exhibition as an invitation to other Indigenous creatives to contribute to a space where difference is not only considered, it is celebrated. The installation features seven aspirational and newly constructed oversized garments, which are adorned with beads and found materials, that have been organized in kaleidoscopic patterns and are suspended from the ceiling on tipi poles or worn during performances. These works are informed by the regalia worn in faith-based ceremonies, among them the Ghost Dance — a pacifist movement that originated with the Northern Paiute and culminated in the 1890 Wounded Knee massacre, and remains active today — paying homage to the past while signaling hope for the future.

*POWER FULL BECAUSE WE'RE DIFFERENT* also offers an exploration into the term "two-spirit", a third gender which is both, and neither, male or female and is often embraced by many Indigenous individuals and communities to encompass gender and spiritual identity. The exhibition will include the 1992 documentary *Two Spirit People* by Michel Beauchemin, Lori

Levy, and Gretchen Vogel, which features Indigenous two-spirit individuals discussing the term and their identities as creatives on the streets of the Bay Area.

A new video installation, suspended from the ceiling, will accompany the documentary harnessing both contemporary and early drag culture that facilitates in creating a club-like atmosphere in the first half of the gallery. Titled *Your Spirit Whispers in My Ear (2024)*, the collection of videos are edited by Sancia Miala Shiba Nash with a soundtrack by Patrick Coll and the material for the videos is crowd-sourced from more than 20 Indigenous two-spirit individuals, DJs, drag performers, academics, and activists.

A mirrored, multi-colored wall bisects the gallery space, end-to-end and floor-to-ceiling reflecting the videos and other works in the galleries creating a kaleidoscopic vision for visitors. Seven, 12×12-foot fused glass performance stages with graphic geometric designs further amplify the experience. Each of the oversized garments will be suspended from the ceiling above its corresponding dance floor, and all seven will be distributed on both sides of the wall. These stages will be the site of many of the performances that will unfold throughout the 18-month exhibition.

The exhibition is book-ended in two mezzanine galleries. The lower space contains a new two-channel video depicting Gibson wearing all seven garments in the exhibition, almost unaware of the camera, yet still conscious of being seen. This new video is inspired by legendary performer Leigh Bowery, a longtime influence for Gibson's work. In particular, Gibson is channeling Bowery's 1988 performance at the Anthony D'Offay Gallery in London, in which Bowery took up residence in the gallery's street facing window behind a one way mirror. Each day Bowery tried on different costumes while preening and posing. Though the audience could see him, Bowery could only see himself raising the question of revealing and concealing one's presence. The upper space will contain a resource space curated with Gibson and Antonia Oliver at the artist's studio presented in three iterations over the 18-month exhibition; this space will open with a focus on videos, costumes, and texts by Two-Spirit contributors to Gibson's exhibition.

*POWER FULL BECAUSE WE'RE DIFFERENT* collaborators include program contributors Laura Ortman, Emily Johnson, Martha Redbone, Lou Cornum, Divide and Dissolve, Arielle Twist, Zoon, Raven Chacon, devynn emory, MX Oops and more, and video contributors Sean Stevens and Adrian Snyder, Ty Fierce, Metteba Navi Ho, Carla Rossi / Anthony Hudson, Joseph Pierce, Miko Thomas, Morgan Wallace, Arielle Twist, Lou Cornum, Kairyn Potts, Lady Shug, Beejee (Qahir-beejee Llanceza) Peco, Cocoa Chandelier, Jontay Kahm, Dan Taulapapa McMullin, Razelle Benally, Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie, Yoli, Hinaleimoana Wong-Kalu, Charlie Amáyá Scott, Kira Xonorika, Evan James Atwood, Theo Jean Cuthand and others.

In celebration of the artists and exhibition, MASS MoCA will host a day of special preview activities on November 2 starting at 3:00pm with a conversation between Gibson and Albert McLeod, a Status Indian with ancestry from Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation and the Metis community of Norway House in northern Manitoba. McLeod has over thirty years of experience as a human rights activist and is one of the directors of the Two-Spirited People of Manitoba.

The exhibition's Opening Preview Reception will follow at 5:30pm including a special in-gallery performance by Takiaya Reed of the band Divide and Dissolve, and a closing performance by an artist invited specifically by Gibson to be announced soon.

For tickets and more information visit [massmoca.org](https://massmoca.org).

Prior to the exhibition opening at MASS MoCA, Gibson will reveal a new mural in collaboration with The Rose Kennedy Greenway in Dewey Square, Boston, MA, on view beginning September 19, 2024.

### **About the Artist**

Jeffrey Gibson (b. 1972, Colorado Springs, CO; lives and works in New York) grew up in major urban centers in the United States, Germany, Korea, and the U.K. A mid-career multidisciplinary artist, he is a citizen of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and half Cherokee, whose practice includes sculpture, painting, printmaking, video, and performance. Gibson earned his Master of Arts in painting at the Royal College of Art, London, in 1998 and his Bachelor of Fine Arts in painting from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1995. His work is in the permanent collections of the Denver Art Museum; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian; National Gallery of Canada; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art; the Museum of Modern Art; and the Whitney Museum of American Art. Gibson is a past TED Foundation Fellow and a Joan Mitchell Grant recipient. He is a recipient of the 2019 MacArthur Foundation Fellowship. He is an artist-in-residence at Bard College and lives and works near Hudson, New York. Gibson currently represents the United States at the 60th edition of La Biennale di Venezia. He is the first Indigenous artist to represent the United States with a solo presentation in the national pavilion.

### **About MASS MoCA**

MASS MoCA is celebrating its 25th Anniversary under Director Kristy Edmunds, not only as the largest, multidisciplinary, contemporary art museum in North America, but also as a creative campus with a regional, national, and global impact. MASS MoCA is one of the world's liveliest centers for making and enjoying today's most evocative art, and is an indispensable home for artists who stretch toward what has yet to be created. From its beginnings as the major textile mill Arnold Print Works in the mid-19th century, to its days as the Sprague Electric Company in the mid-20th century, to its current iteration as a globally renowned contemporary art museum and fabrication center, the 24-acre MASS MoCA campus has a rich history of serving as an economic engine of the city of North Adams and the surrounding region. With vast galleries and a stunning variety of indoor and outdoor performing arts venues, MASS MoCA is able to embrace art in all forms. For more information visit [www.massmoca.org](https://www.massmoca.org) or follow on Instagram at [@massmoca](https://www.instagram.com/massmoca).

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