

Andrea Carlson: *Endless Sunshine* is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Misa Jeffereis, Associate Curator, with support from Grace Early, Exhibitions Assistant.

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Artist Talk: Andrea Carlson

Saturday, March 7, 11:00 am–12:00 pm

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Visit our website for more information about *Andrea Carlson: Endless Sunshine* including an **audio guide** from the artist.



Andrea Carlson (b. 1979) is a visual artist of Grand Portage Ojibwe/European descent who maintains a studio practice in northern Minnesota. Carlson's recent exhibitions include *A Constant Sky* at the Denver Art Museum (solo, 2025–26), *Shimmer on Horizons* at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (solo, 2024), and *Scientia Sexualis* at the Institute of Contemporary Art Los Angeles (group, 2024–25). Her recent public art commissions include *You are on Potawatomi Land*, Chicago Riverwalk (2021–23), and *RED EXIT*, Whitney Museum of American Art with TF Cornerstone and High Line Art (2021). In 2020, Carlson cofounded the Center for Native Futures in Chicago. Carlson has been awarded numerous grants and fellowships including Creative Capital (2024), United States Artist Visual Art Fellowship (2022), Chicago Artadia Award (2021), and Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters and Sculptors Grant (2017). Her work is collected by the Whitney Museum of American Art, the British Museum, the National Gallery of Canada, the Walker Art Center, and Minneapolis Institute of Art, among many other institutions.



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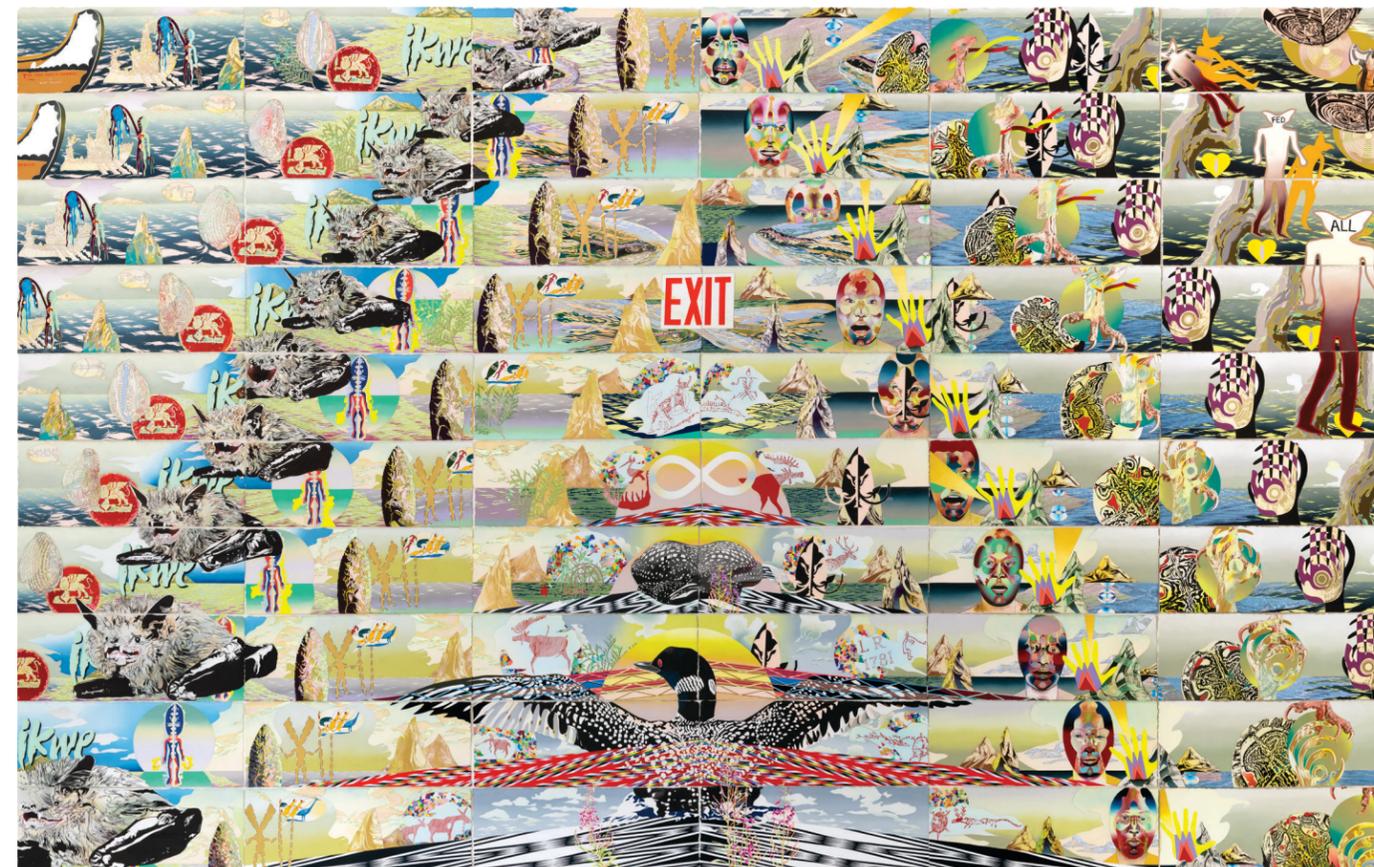


Gallery Guide
Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis

March 6–August 9, 2026



Andrea Carlson Endless Sunshine



Andrea Carlson, *Red Exit*, 2019. Acrylic, ink, oil, gouache, watercolor, colored pencil, marker, and graphite on paper, 10 × 14 feet. Collection of Whitney Museum of American Art. Photo: Eric Stephenson.

Endless Sunshine brings together recent and new large-scale paintings, prints, and sculpture by Andrea Carlson (b. 1979, Grand Portage Ojibwe/European descent), made between 2018 and the present. Her paintings point to vivid, imagined landscapes that the artist has filled with intricate, collage-like imagery. The spaces depicted are not actual lands nor do they allow the viewer to enter. Often beyond the central

figures in the foreground, the space is virtually impenetrable. The overwhelming scale of Carlson's works, too, denies us access into these landscapes, preventing any sense of possession of the land. The artist describes her paintings as "uncolonize-able landscapes." Carlson's practice interrogates longing and desire, permission and refusal, as well as themes around efforts to reclaim ancestral lands.

In Carlson’s layered, multi-panel paintings, she cites tropes of American Landscape painting that were historically employed as justification for westward expansion and settlement. The artist instead populates her sprawling landscapes with abundant references to Ojibwe culture, objects from art history presented as invasive elements, and monuments outside of their historical context. Her paintings confront ongoing colonial histories of erasure and dispossession.

The horizon line is a persistent organizing principle in Carlson’s paintings, inspired by the vast horizon of Lake Superior, her ancestral homelands. The works are connected through a continual horizon line set at the same height from piece to piece across the Museum’s galleries, suggesting the infinite surface of the Earth. The exhibition’s title, *Endless Sunshine*, reinforces the idea of infinity and that, as Carlson states, “sunshine wraps around the Earth no matter where we are.”

Prints

Carlson’s prints to date include three works, all presented in the exhibition. For the artist, prints serve as a way to combat overwhelming feelings of cultural loss—of language and art forms—through colonial cultural assimilation. The very nature of printmaking is to produce multiples, allowing works to be propagated and disseminated more broadly. Each of Carlson’s prints was made in an edition of 20, creating, as Carlson states, “safety in numbers.”



Endless Sunshine (detail), 2026. Sumi ink, oil, colored pencil, ink, gouache, and archival spray varnish on paper and birch bark. Assembled suite of 12, 46 × 90 inches. Courtesy the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco.

Endless Sunshine

Endless Sunshine is a new body of work comprising Carlson’s first multi-panel paintings on birch bark. It reflects on the 1854 Treaty of La Point, through which the US government forcibly dispossessed the Ojibwe of the land along the north shore of Lake Superior. Under the treaty, the Ojibwe retained rights to harvest from the land.

In 2021, Minnesota’s Cook County Chamber of Commerce supported the development of a ski resort on this contested land, which would expand into the Superior National Forest.

For *Endless Sunshine*, Carlson harvested birch bark from Cook County and incorporated it into her work as an enactment of Ojibwe treaty rights. The trees from which she harvested are now marked by a large band from where the bark has been stripped away—serving, in her mind, as a warning to non-Native people of Ojibwe presence and their rights. The imagery in this painting references boreal forests, native plants, Ojibwe mats on which negotiations took place, Ojibwe origin and land narratives, and what Carlson calls “cultural debris,” such as Greek sculpture and art works by other artists. *Endless Sunshine* surfaces the intergenerational theft of land committed against her people and sheds light on the continued challenges of maintaining treaty rights.

Sculpture

The grouping of wooden columns in the exhibition consists of two sculptural series entitled *The Surveyor’s Obstacle* and *Low Relief Mound*. The columnal form references effigy staffs, which rest within some Indigenous earthworks known as mounds. Effigy staffs are wooden poles topped with carved human figures or animals. Carlson is equally inspired by the thousands of mounds, many of which are burial sites, made of built-up earth that lie across the Midwest and beyond. Colonial expansion, including the construction of highways and urban development, has flattened, fragmented, and destroyed countless mounds. Notably, in this work Carlson cites Man Mound, a 214-foot-long ancient earthwork in Wisconsin that is now fractured by a road. She describes Man Mound as both a driving force and inspiration to her practice. For Carlson, this figure that rises up from the land tethers us to non-colonial histories and ideologies, stories quite literally built into the land itself.

Uninvited Guests

The series *Uninvited Guests* comprises five works, which each contains four stacked panels that push and pull, moving in and out of wholeness. This suggests that each of the complex figures pictured is deeply conflicted. Davy Crockett and James Bowie are two of the “(anti)hero” figures in this series, depicted for their role in colonizing Texas and culminating in their death at the Battle of the Alamo in 1836. Other works present mythological scenes of cannibalism which is, for Carlson, a metaphor for assimilation. In an era of colonization, the dominant culture forcibly homogenizes the nondominant—in effect appropriating, consuming, and eradicating the nondominant culture.

Carlson cites the “Cannibal Boom” or “Mondo” films of the 1960s to 80s. “Mondo” represents an exploitative form of documentary filmmaking that utilizes staged violence



Cast a Shadow, 2021. Oil, acrylic, gouache, ink, colored pencil, and graphite on paper. Assembled suite of 24, 46 × 180 inches. Forge Project Collection, traditional lands of the Moh-He-Con-Nuck. Photo: Rik Sfera.

interlaced with brutal hunting scenes. These filmmakers often invented bizarre and absurd tribal rituals, exploited colonized people, and reinforced narratives of justified conquest. Here, Carlson flips such narratives on their head, recasting dominant culture as the cannibalizing force.

Cast a Shadow

Cast a Shadow was created in 2021 amid global debates over monuments and collective memory, and reflects on forms of commemoration. Across the painting, Carlson repeats imagery of games, dolls, and mounds of earth that carry personal and broader cultural significance. At the center of the painting, these images coalesce around a stone structure floating above the landscape—a reference to a drawing by the late artist George Morrison of a proposed tombstone that was never realized. Carlson depicts Morrison’s monument surrounded by sources of light, yet it casts no shadows. She hints at the idea that commemoration can be expressed through memory, ideas, and actions rather than physical objects.

The Indifference of Fire

The Indifference of Fire references fire in numerous ways. Living in Chicago when she made this piece, Carlson cites the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, which killed an estimated 300 people and destroyed 2,100 acres of the city. Zhegagoynak, the land now known as Chicago, is the ancestral homeland of the Potawatomi people. The Potawatomi are the “Keepers of the Fire” among the Anishinaabe people—the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi, collectively—whose lands span the Great Lakes Region. Historically, the Potawatomi used prescribed burning to regenerate Zhegagoynak’s prairies.

With the two central texts, Carlson alludes to the dual healing and destructive properties of fire. She includes imagery of artworks by Anishinaabe artists and family, such as a black ash basket by Kelly Church and a dreamcatcher by Carlson’s great uncle Raymond Duhaime, asserting Anishinaabe people and their culture at the very center of this composition—and, by extension, at the center of Chicago’s story.

Medicinescape

Medicinescape contends with notions of duality. Pictured prominently on either side of a central shell are the front and back of a medicine bag used to hold herbs and remedies. Oppositional imagery is woven on each side of Ojibwe medicine bags. Flanking either side of the medicine bag are opposing figures from Greek mythology: Medea, a vengeful goddess who killed her children, and Nike, the goddess of victory. Carlson notes that the liminal space in between two entities—good and evil, dawn and dusk, horizon and shore lines, for example—is where there is “an energy of exchange or tension that I hope to bring to the work.” Dispersed throughout *Medicinescape* are depictions of plants known for their medicinal properties: clover, raspberry leaves, cedar, white campion, and daisies. This work layers references to plants and animals that inhabit the thin margins of survival.

RED WELCOME

One of her largest works to date, *RED WELCOME* explores notions of deep time. Carlson includes references to the Peterborough Petroglyphs—the largest known concentration of Indigenous rock carvings, located outside of what is now Toronto. These “teaching rocks” feature 1,200 images depicting turtles, snakes, birds, and humans that were carved by Anishinaabe people in 900 to 1100 AD.

RED WELCOME takes the shape of a grid, a trope Carlson uses to organize information. In her paintings, there is a sense of a narrative unfolding and of time passing, almost like cinematic film cells. In this understanding, individual panels emulate the frames of film. Each row forms a panoramic spatial landscape, and when looked at from top to bottom, the panels evoke the time-based panning of a camera. The overall image cannot be absorbed immediately and viewers get lost, as if in a boat’s wake. Carlson states, “The cells also make it hard to imagine entering the landscape without the viewer becoming fragmented themselves.”