



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Lori Brooks, director of communications
405 951 0000 | lbrooks@okcontemp.org

**Jeffrey Gibson: *Speak to Me* Tells Stories Influenced
by Native American Aesthetics, Pop Culture and More**

All artwork is comprised of a variety of influences. In *Speak to Me*, his solo exhibition opening Thursday, Feb. 9 at Oklahoma Contemporary, multimedia artist Jeffrey Gibson literally spells out some of his.

Gibson's practice includes painting, sculpture, fiber, ceramics, video and performance, and *Speak to Me* features recent works that draw upon, among other things, his Native American heritage (Choctaw and Cherokee). Many of the pieces also incorporate texts with personal resonance for Gibson: Lyrics from pop, house music and rap and some of Gibson's own words are beaded into the art.

Gibson has created objects with many stories to tell, with influences ranging from intertribal aesthetics and traditions to popular music, modernist art, gospel and '80's fashion.

"One way to consider the exhibition is through the lens of music, which is very important to Jeffrey," said Jennifer Scanlan, curatorial and exhibitions director. "He often uses texts in his beaded pieces that are lyrics from songs, and he refers to his compositions as 'mash-ups.' In the same way that a DJ samples music from many different songs, in any one piece, Jeffrey samples aspects of many different cultures that have influenced him."

The exhibition's title, *Speak to Me*, is illustrated in the video *one becomes the other*, which Gibson produced during a residency at the Denver Art Museum. In *one becomes the other*, members of the Denver powwow community have conversations with objects from the museum's vast Native American collection. The objects are addressed as living beings, with stories to tell.

"We took *one becomes the other* as our starting point and used it as a framework for interpreting all of Jeffrey's works," Scanlan said. "What kind of conversations can you have with an artwork? What kind of stories can it tell? Jeffrey has, almost literally, woven many references into each piece."

Gibson's own references come from all over the world. His mother is originally from Brigg's Community, just outside of Tahlequah, but Gibson's family moved often for his father's job, living in the United States, Germany, Korea and the UK. His connection to a Native community became increasingly important to him when he left home to study at the Art Institute of Chicago and later at the Royal College of Art in London. In the two decades since, Gibson has continued to gain prominence as he draws thoughtful attention to Native American traditions while affirming their vitality and relevance to contemporary life.

3000 General Pershing Blvd | Oklahoma City, OK 73107 | 405.951.0000 | oklahomacontemporary.org

“Jeffrey is in the middle of an amazing moment right now,” Scanlan said, “so we are excited to be able to bring him here to Oklahoma, where he has family connections.”

In the past year, Gibson has had solo exhibitions at the Savanna College of Art and Design and at the Haggerty Museum of Art (Milwaukee) and been in exhibitions at SITE Santa Fe and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. He is part of the first edition of the Desert X Biennial, in Palm Springs, with an enormous outdoor installation opening at the end of February. He is planning two major 2018 solo exhibitions, at the Wellin Museum in upstate New York and a mid-career retrospective at the Denver Art Museum. He also has works in the permanent collections of major museums, including the Smithsonian Institution and MFA Boston.

“In spite of his growing fame, Jeffrey is very easy to work with,” Scanlan said. “He is generous about sharing credit for the creation of his work with his many studio assistants, and I know he has been to Oklahoma in the past acting as a mentor to other artists. He’s a fantastic artist and a great human being, receiving some well-deserved recognition.”

In addition to the two dozen pieces in the exhibition (ceramics, beaded panels, sculpture and video), a Learning Gallery offers visitors additional ways to interact with *Speak to Me*. It includes touch tiles, so that guests can explore how the materials Gibson uses in his works feel and sound, and a threading station for families to create their own art, as well as a pop-up library in collaboration with the Metropolitan Library System.

“The Learning Gallery will help visitors of all ages connect to Jeffrey’s exhibition,” said Erin Oldfield, director of education and public programming. “Families can focus on works in the gallery then engage with each other in this space to get a hands-on understanding of how his art is made, create pieces of their own or even share their words and phrases to inspire others.”

The educational area also features beautiful, large-scale photos taken at powwows and other cultural gatherings by Lester Harragarra (Otoe-Missouria). These images further illustrate how Gibson sources materials (like beads, jingles, fringe and coins) from cultural realms and combines them with influences from his own life.

“Lester’s photographs are also currently on exhibition at the Red Earth Gallery, Scanlan said. “We are excited to partner with them during the Red Earth Festival; our closing weekend, we will stay open an extra day and offer special tours to Red Earth attendees.”

Scanlan was introduced to Harragarra by Shoshana Wasserman, (Thlopthlocco Tribal Town, Muscogee Creek) director of communications and cultural tourism at the American Indian Cultural Center and Museum. Wasserman worked with Oklahoma Contemporary on a number of *Speak to Me* initiatives, including the Learning Gallery.

Along with the Red Earth partnership, the exhibition will include a variety of programming through its mid-June run. On Feb. 11, attendees of exchange: an Un-symposium can discuss artmaking and identity with Gibson, artist Will Wilson (whose exhibition PHOTO/SYNTHESIS is currently on display at the Fred

Jones Jr. Museum of Art), curators Scanlan and heather ahtone and community leaders. The event will be held from 2-4 p.m. at FJMA in Norman.

On April 1, sound artist Nathan Young (Delaware) will present *New Native Art*, based on his personal history with, and research into, the peyote music of the Native American Church. Young will perform *Lullaby for Peyote Tapes*, followed by a selection of short films by Native American artists and filmmakers curated in partnership with deadCenter.

Scanlan said Oklahoma Contemporary is also working on *Speak to Me*-related programs with the Oklahoma City Theatre Company's Native American Play Festival, OKC Artists for Social Justice and the Metropolitan Library System.

Artistic Director Jeremiah Matthew Davis said these partnerships "generate different ways to experience this important show and to share other artworks in conversation with it."

"As we look to the future on our Midtown arts campus, we see this inclusive, collaborative approach as the key to unlocking our community's creative potential," Davis said. "By building active spaces for creative exploration, we can invite artists and audiences to speak directly to each other."

###

A media kit, including this press release, a portrait of the artist and high-resolution images of his works, is at bit.ly/OCGibsonKit. Past press releases and additional information are archived at oklahomacontemporary.org/about/media.

About Oklahoma Contemporary Arts Center

Currently located at State Fair Park, Oklahoma Contemporary Arts Center aims to encourage artistic expression in all its forms through education and exhibitions. We endeavor to instill in the public a lifetime appreciation of the arts and enthusiasm for creative practice through a broad range of educational programs, exhibitions and cultural offerings, including:

- Youth art camps that help students begin a lifetime relationship with art and creativity.
- Art classes and workshops where students of all ages find the chance to learn and grow.
- Exhibitions that feature the work of emerging and mid-career artists.
- Free public lectures, artist talks and events that enrich Oklahoma City's cultural offerings.

Oklahoma Contemporary is in the midst of a capital campaign to create a spectacular new arts education and cultural resource on a 4.6-acre site at NW 11th and Broadway in Oklahoma City. The arts education campus will include:

A four-story, 50,000-square-foot building with classrooms, galleries, a dance studio and a flexible theater space to promote learning about the artists of our time and educating those to come. Expanded classes in ceramics, fiber, painting, sculpture, drawing and dance, plus a new media curriculum with programs in filmmaking, animation, photography, web design and 3-D printing. A remodeled 10,000-square-foot building will house an Industrial Arts program, focusing on wood, ceramics, metal and jewelry. Grounds with space for outdoor sculpture exhibits, children's art education activities and outdoor music, movie and drama productions.

Oklahoma Contemporary is a regional 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization founded in 1989 by businessman and philanthropist Christian Keese and Kirkpatrick Foundation Director Marilyn Myers.

3000 General Pershing Blvd | Oklahoma City, OK 73107 | 405.951.0000 | oklahomacontemporary.org