IOWA ARTISTS 2026: HENRY PAYER

Aagakinąk Haciwi: We Live Opposite Each Other

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A.H. BLANK GALLERY | KYLE J. AND SHARON KRAUSE ATRIUM

CURATOR | ELIZABETH GOLLNICK

Payer evokes this history of displacement through the process of collage: selecting, excising, and recomposing images to tell contemporary Ho-Chunk stories.

The Matriarchy 2025 (UPPER) Stereograph card (LOWER, FIG 1) **And Back** 2023 (PAGES 2–3)

SITTING OPPOSITE

ELIZABETH GOLLNICK, PH.D.

For Henry Payer (b. 1986, Sioux City, Iowa), painting and collage are strategies for exploring both personal and Ho-Chunk histories. The artist layers archival material and references to pop culture to create what he calls a "graphic shorthand," meaning "a form of picture-writing that connects to Indigenous art and history by physically relocating images, objects, and materials as pictographs."[1] Over the course of the nineteenth century, the Ho-Chunk were forcibly removed from their ancestral lands that spanned areas in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, and Illinois. They were repeatedly relocated—first to northeast Iowa, then Minnesota, then South Dakota, and, finally, Nebraska. Today, the Ho-Chunk are composed of two tribal entities, the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska (of which Payer is an enrolled member) and the Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin. Payer evokes this history of displacement through the process of collage, selecting, excising, and recomposing images to tell contemporary Ho-Chunk stories. "[T]he act of removal/relocation shares the connection between collage and my cultural background," he explains.[2]

Payer draws inspiration and imagery for his collages from photographic archives. He mimics the format of the stereograph card (FIG 1, PAGE 4), a style of photography popular in the mid-nineteenth century. Taken with a special camera with dual lenses that are spaced at the same distance apart as human eyes, a stereograph card is composed of two almost identical photographs side-by-side. When viewed through a special device called a stereoscope, akin to the contemporary View-Master toy, the stereograph image appears three-dimensional. The technology relies on human binocular vision: each eye provides slightly different images that the brain triangulates to determine distance and depth. In the nineteenth century, this type of photography was used as a form of visual tourism, an opportunity to imagine oneself on a faraway adventure. This form of armchair travel was also propaganda for American western expansion. Payer is a collector of images in this format, acquiring them first on visits to antique stores and, later, on eBay. His collection includes many cards made by the photographer James H. Hamilton (c. 1833–1897), who was active in the Sioux City area and documented the Ho-Chunk living nearby. In *Matriarchy* (2025) (PAGE 4), three women and two children pose in front of a ciiporoke, a Ho-Chunk house made from a bent sapling frame covered with cattail reeds. In Payer's rendering, the dwelling is thatched with thin strips of newsprint from the contemporary paper, the *Winnebago Indian News*, linking documentation of the Ho-Chunk's past with their stories from the present. The colored dots that obscure the children's faces—red, yellow, blue, and green— are the colors of the Bear Clan, of which Payer is a member. He recalls the use of such dots in the work of the western conceptual artist John Baldessari (1931–2020), who often obscured the faces in his reproductions of found photographs and film stills to conceal the subject's identities, shifting figures from individuals to types. Similarly, nineteenth-century photographers largely cast their Native subjects as types, staging their photographs and providing little information about their sitters. Payer keeps the viewer at a distance; we do not observe a three-dimensional representation (in both the literal and figurative sense) that puts us in the same space as this family, but rather the artifice produced by stereoscopic photography. We perceive the documentation and objectification of Ho-Chunk culture, while also experiencing Payer's artistic interventions in that space.

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Payer transforms imagery from the movie into a meditation on dislocation and memory. "Dorothy could click her heels and return home, but the Ho-Chunk cannot," he explains.

Payer's work abounds with wryly humorous references to pop culture and advertising that reimagine this imagery through a Ho-Chunk perspective. In *No Place Like Home* (2024) (PAGE 7), glittery red slippers, an allusion to Dorothy from the *Wizard of Oz* (1939), share the frame with regalia featuring a ribbon appliqué pattern designed by Payer to look like the poppy flowers that put Dorothy to sleep, forgetting her quest to find a way home. Payer transforms imagery from the movie into a meditation on dislocation and memory. "Dorothy could click her heels and return home, but the Ho-Chunk cannot," he explains. In *Superman Removing the Winnebago Back to Nebraska* (2025) (PAGE 24), Payer draws upon the 1938 Action Comic that featured the first appearance of the character Superman, reimagining the scene as a tongue-in-cheek depiction of the American hero transporting a Winnebago RV using his superstrength. In many of his works, this vehicle, produced from the 1960s to the late 2000s, recurs as a symbolic representation of the Ho-Chunk people, their long journey to Nebraska, and, sometimes, the artist himself. Ho-Chunk translates to "People of the Big Voice." The word Winnebago is an exonym, a name for a group of people used by outsiders. It is an Anglicization of the name for the Ho-Chunk used by the Algonquins that was adopted by white settlers and became the federally recognized name of Payer's tribe. Today, the word appears as a place name across a large swath of the Midwest, including in Iowa, where the headquarters of Winnebago Industries (the producer of the RV) long resided in Winnebago County. The Winnebago Corporation co-opted Indigenous imagery and patterns, while also naming versions of their RVs the Winnebago Indian, Winnebago Chieftan, and Winnebago Brave, to associate their brand with a sense of freedom. Payer exploits the irony of this advertising: his people were known as the "Wandering Winnebago" due to their repeated forced relocations in the nineteenth century. In Payer's collage *Winnebago Lodge No. IV* (2025) (FRONT COVER), the frame of a ciiporoke sits atop the vehicle, no longer a stationary home, but rather a dwelling carried from place to place.

Payer also draws on the storied tradition of ledger art, developed by Indigenous warriors, members of the Cheyenne, Kiowa, and Arapaho tribes who were imprisoned at Fort Marion in St. Augustine, Florida between 1875 and 1878. Separated from their traditional artistic materials, such as birch bark and animal hide, the men began recording life events on the pages of old ledger or account books. The practice was the reinvention of a centuries-old pictographic documentary tradition, resourcefully reimagined under conditions of deprivation and incarceration. Their drawings were intentionally created for sale and as gifts to visiting officers and tourists. "As soon as these Native artists were signing their name on the paper and selling it to the tourists, the tourists were then putting it on their walls or in museums. That gave birth to what's 'Native art' today," explains Payer.[3] In contrast to many contemporary ledger artists, who foreground the paper in their work, Payer often overpaints it completely, subsuming the history of the paper under a palimpsest of other cultural references both historical and current.

In his *La Garnison Mentalité (Garrison Mentality)* series (2013–present), Payer wraps US-military-made blankets around repurposed windowpanes, then applies expressive, gestural painted marks to the rough surface of the wool. He collages together found materials including ledger paper, clippings from magazines, stamps, photographs, postcards, and food wrappers on the blanket. This pairing of gestural painting and cultural ephemera appropriates the Neo-Dada tradition, particularly the formal strategies of Robert Rauschenberg's (1925–2008) *Combines* (1954–64), in which the artist paired painted mark-making with found imagery and materials. For Payer, this ephemera functions as a metonymic device for representing the voice of a dominant American culture that he then reimagines. In this context, the GI wool blanket holds many meanings. It is a symbol of European military expansion through the building of forts and garrisons on Native lands and the commandeering of natural resources, as well as a reminder of the dark history of using infected blankets to spread disease among the Native population. As the artist notes, "Wool would replace the depleted animal hides used to make shelter, blankets, and clothing. Later, these GI wool blankets would also [be] provided to children taken from Indigenous communities at government-run boarding schools."[4] Payer's use of the GI blanket in his work is a transformative process, shifting these negative

No Place Like Home 2024

The Wandering Winnebago No5 2025

associations towards an embrace of Native symbolism for the material—the ceremonial gift of a blanket as a form of protection. Thus, the blanket becomes "an instrument of Indigenous empowerment, resiliency, and survivance."[5] Survivance, a term coined by the Anishinaabe scholar and writer Gerald Vizenor, describes strategies of empowerment employed by Native peoples:

> The nature of survivance is unmistakable in native stories, natural reason, remembrance, traditions, and customs and is clearly observable in narrative resistance and personal attributes, such as the native humanistic tease, vital irony, spirit, cast of mind, and moral courage. The character of survivance creates a sense of native presence over absence, nihility, and victimry. Native survivance is an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuance of stories [...].[6]

Payer's work is a continuation of a tradition of visual storytelling spanning generations that attests to Native presence and endurance in the contemporary moment.

For the showing of his work at the Des Moines Art Center, the artist has also made his first foray into sculpture. Titled *Waac (canoe)* (2025), the piece mimics the shape of a dugout canoe but rendered in cardboard and concrete. It is a reminder of the Ho-Chunk's forced relocation to Crow Creek, South Dakota between 1863–65, when they were left marooned on land that was unsuitable for farming and hunting and, as a result, began to starve. Payer's ancestors created canoes from the cottonwood trees found along the Missouri River and fled south to seek refuge with the Omaha tribe in Nebraska, from whom they purchased the land that became the Nebraska Ho-Chunk reservation. The juxtaposition of heavy concrete (a material unsuitable for boat building) with cardboard (a material often used to transport objects from place to place) captures the condition of the Ho-Chunk as a peripatetic tribe now rooted in Nebraska. As Payer notes, "I use the canoe as a symbol of our plight as well as a reference to our immobility and physical attachment to the land."[7]

The title Payer chose for this exhibition, *Aagakinąk Haciwi: We Live Opposite Each Other*, encompasses a multiplicity of meanings. The direct translation of aagakinąk haciwi is "two houses sitting opposite each other." Payer explains: "Aagaki is to be opposite. Nąk is a positional, so Aagakinąk Haciwi is to be opposite—we're sitting opposite one another. Within our language we have positionals, so there's the stranding position, seated position, and the lying/moving position. Our language is based on our perception of how we see things."[8] In Payer's work, perspective is a process of synthesis, the bringing together of seemingly disparate contexts. One valence of the title references the boundaries of the land and geography: Payer's home in Sioux City sits on the opposite side of the Missouri River from his homeland of the Ho-Chunk reservation in Nebraska. Alternatively, it is Iowa that divides two places, since the state rests between the two Ho-Chunk nations, one in Nebraska, the other in Wisconsin. It is the condition of the artist himself, for whom Ho-Chunk traditions sit opposite Western culture in daily life. The phrase is also a metaphor for experiencing Payer's work, in which the contemporary and historical, modernity and tradition, sit opposite each other, yet inextricably intertwined. It is also an invitation: the artist welcomes us to sit opposite him, sharing space: "Through materials I speak about Ho-Chunk history, (dis)placement and tangible cultural aesthetics to offer insight into our shared collective backgrounds."[9]

Payer's use of the GI blanket in his work is a transformative process, shifting these negative associations towards an embrace of Native symbolism for the material—the ceremonial gift of a blanket as a form of protection.

ENDNOTES

1 Artist Statement, *Henry Payer: La Garnison Mentalité*, K Gallery (Dec 15, 2022 – Feb 24, 2023), n.p

2 Artist statement in Levering, Allison, "Henry Payer 'Left on Red' Art Exhibition at Kansas University" https://theindianleader.com/2024/02/07/henry-payer-left-on-red-art-exhibition-at-kansas-university-2/

3 *In the Studio: Henry Payer, Jr.,* https://www.joanmitchellfoundation.org/journal/in-the-studio-henry-payer-jr

4 *Henry Payer: La Garnison Mentalité*, n.p.

5 Ibid.

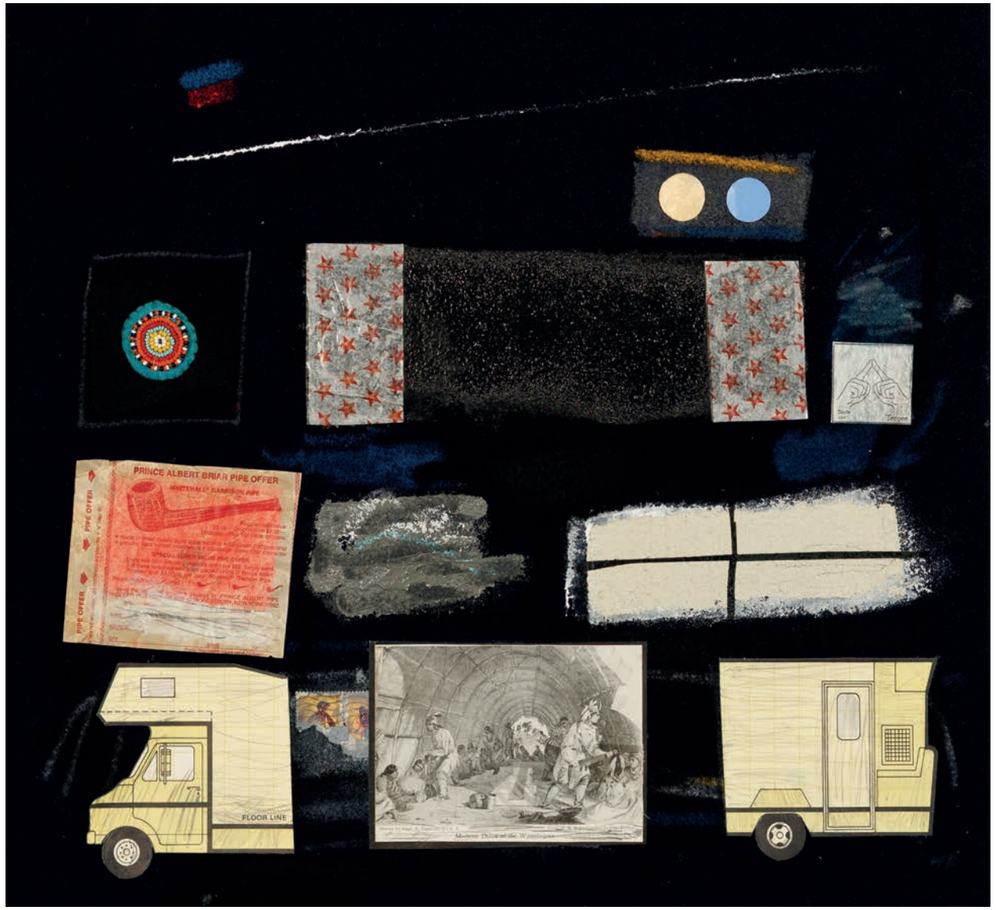
6 Gerald Robert Vizenor, "Aesthetics of Survivance," *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 1.

7 Interview with the author, September 25, 2025.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

What Separates Us Connects Us 2018



Under the Cover of Darkness They Danced 2022

INTERVIEW

CURATOR ELIZABETH GOLLNICK, PH.D. WITH HENRY PAYER

What made you want to become an artist?
As a professional, I have two backgrounds. My earliest memory would be when I was a young child and my father gave me a giant sketchbook, 18 x 24 inches, and then told me to draw on it. That's the story that I always begin with because that was the earliest introduction to art and drawing something on the page. I gave it to him and he said, "Okay, now finish the entire page." That really brought me into a commitment to finishing a project very early on.

My mother—who did beadwork and made regalia—influenced me very early on in terms of culture. On a professional level, it wasn't until high school that I attended the Oscar House Summer Art Institute in Vermillion, South Dakota, at the University of South Dakota — that's a two-week program that was at the time geared towards Junior and Senior high school students, Native in particular. They invited them up for a two-week program. They learned by doing drawing classes and painting classes, photography. There's pottery, there's different classes that they offered at the time. Artists are invited and they do a week-long teaching of their own practice to give the students a little insight into their projects and allow them to do the work that they do, which is really cool. I met a few Native artists who were very prominent in their field, and they allowed me to see firsthand that you could do art as a profession and allowed me to understand what it took to be an artist. You can go to art school, and you can do it as a career choice.

You often repurpose archival material in your work. How did you become interested in archival objects and what do they mean in your practice?
I think the first time I came across any type of archival materials was after undergrad. I took a year off and stayed in Santa Fe, and I would go visit Canyon Road and the galleries and museums. I happened to walk into, I think, a Sotheby's, and they had a tiny pocket ledger, maybe about 8 x 6 inches and it was from the 1800s, 1820s, and it was probably $300. I was like, "I'm going to buy that," just to have it and do some artwork on it.

Ledger art is a Plains [Indian] graphic art that began in the 1860s. My understanding is that prisoners at Fort Marion — Cheyenne and Kiowa and Arapaho and the Comanches — were given ledger books and colored pencils to record their lives — both former lives and contemporary lives. It was at this point when the tourists would come and visit the prisoners, and then purchase the books or the pages, that's, in theory, what gave birth to "Native art." As soon as these Native artists were signing their name on the paper and selling it to the tourists, the tourists were then putting it on their walls or in museums, that gave birth to what's "Native art" today.

I still have a few of those first ledger pages, and it was such a coveted item that I really didn't touch it for a long time. But, also it had value, and people would trade papers. So, I used it to trade for larger papers, larger ledger sheets. They used to have the Northern Plains Indian Art Market here in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and I would always get to visit with artists like Jim Yellowhawk, Duane "Chuckie" Wilcox, Terrence Guardipee, Donald Montileaux…ledger artists who were known for it. They gave me the push, the motivation, like, go ahead and try it. You're not really hurting anybody, as long as you're remaining within the traditional perspective. You're able to do it. I held on to those pages for a long time and didn't really mess with them until I got to grad school. It was during this time when I was traveling back and forth from Wisconsin and Nebraska that I would stop at historic locations that were prominent for the Ho-Chunk known as TCPs, Traditional Cultural Properties, in Northeastern Iowa and specifically Decorah, Iowa, and try to find site-specific materials that had Decorah, Iowa printed on them or were

Eponymous (Dozen Grey Wolves) 2019


Prendre
Nehmen
Take

ABOVE **Anthropocene Epoch** 2022 **Neutral Ground (Ioway)** 2025 (PAGES 14–15)

specific to the area. I just began to gather all these materials, and by the end of grad school, I was utilizing them in a way that was different from my peers.

Even now, I use the ledger paper, cover the entire page, and don't place so much value on the paper. Before it was such a coveted thing that I didn't want to touch it and didn't want to mess it up, but now I'm totally just disregarding that whole theory and covering the entire page. How do I talk to art history, in what ways can I converse with art history, and Native art history in particular?

Where do you get the stereograph cards and the postcards you use in your work?

I began to just frequent the antique stores. A lot of those would be found within their stacks of postcards. They'd go by state, and then there would be novelty ones, cowboys, and then there would be Indians. I could look through them and find postcards that fit the compositions I was trying to make. I found out about eBay, and then it was a lot easier, and I could be a lot more specific in terms of what I was searching for collecting. I began to collect specifically stereographs from the area here in Nebraska. James H. Hamilton was a photographer here in Sioux City, and he photographed the Ho-Chunk here in northeastern Nebraska, as well as the Omaha. I utilized those as my references in terms of historical reference, and I began to find postcards taken by turn of the century photographers in early 1900s. Ones I've collected recently were from the 1920s, and it's in Winnebago, Nebraska, when it was just barely a town, and so you could see the early transculturation that was happening of my people. They're wearing button-up shirts and little hats, coveralls. You can see that appropriation of western culture, non-Native culture.

A lot of your pieces contain pop culture references in addition to historical references. What do you think is important about these contemporary reference points?

For myself, it was always just how do I add humor and to be able to combine pop culture elements as a way for me to reach the viewer. But it's also a way to show our "Native" humor, and how we can poke fun at ourselves, as well as to offer that other side of us. A lot of the times our work is based in historical colonialism and genocide. These kinds of very dark topics are very true to who we are, but it's also important for us to show the other side. How we can relate to such a dark topic. I see around myself, personally, a lot of smiles and humor within my people, even though we have such dark pasts or histories, it's important to offer that kind of contemporary expression of looking at things from that view.

Sometimes your work has an edge, the humor can be very wry or dark. I was wondering about what you think humor should do in a work of art?

Well, I like that uncomfortableness that comes with that. I think a lot of the times, people aren't ready to see such graphic illustrations or depictions, and that humor allows the viewer to come into those things and to sit with it, however uncomfortable. That's important for us as people to sit with our uncomfortableness, because a lot of the times, we can turn away or shy away from it without having to deal with it. If you can make it pretty or inviting, then I think that's also a plus.

Your work explores your personal perspective as well as the collective history of the Ho-Chunk people. How do you understand the relationship between yourself as an individual and the Ho-Chunk as a collective? Or is that not even the way to think about it?

Yeah, I tend not to think about it that way. You know, we grew up with that mentality of, we live in both worlds, when, in reality, we don't really take off our indigeneity. I'm in my house with all my Native objects, and I go outside, and I got to be Native in public. It's not like I can turn it off. I've got dark skin and long hair, so it's one of those things where I have to be myself. It's important to not disassociate with that. Trying to separate myself from the historical things that have happened to my tribe is difficult. I've learned to understand where I'm at within my history. That's a thing I grew up with, and I'm constantly reminded of it in terms of who I represent, and it's one of those things that we were taught as young children. When you go out in the world, you're not just representing yourself; you represent the people. And it's important to continue that cultural continuum. The Ho-Chunks, we have the annual powwow, and that powwow in its entirety is all about how we got here to Nebraska, the sacrifices that our leaders at the time had to make and the decisions they had to make that ultimately concluded with our removals and relocations. That enabled us to stay here in Nebraska without being further removed south or west, and that's something that I've learned to understand where I fit in within the overall history of the Ho-Chunk people.

My work deals with that relocation and removal, and

it's important to have that at the forefront. Now, only recently have I been combining more personal experiences within my work. I've wanted to be more personable and relatable in that regard. A lot of my work was specifically about the Ho-Chunk people and history. Making work with that in mind is good, but also its closing off in terms of what's relatable. You have to really be into history, or you have to really be knowledgeable about the Ho-Chunk people, or you have to learn or even care about local places that the Ho-Chunk have been: northeast Iowa, south-central Minnesota, even Crow Creek in South Dakota. You have to be familiar with these actual locations and the Traditional Cultural Properties that stemmed from us being removed to these areas. It's a long, drawn-out answer, but it's one of those things where it's very important that I can't switch that off. My personal experiences are Ho-Chunk histories. That's the way I'm moving forward as of now.

How did you first become interested in collage? How do you think about the way collage creates meaning?

I dabbled in collage early on. When you're in high school and you're just cutting up magazines and putting them on your wall, I think that's a very early exploration of collage. It wasn't until after undergraduate, one of my friends was doing collage mixed media, and he would put a little piece of paper within his paintings. I remember going to see him, and he was trying to sand that corner off so that it didn't have that piece of paper that you could noticeably see. I thought, wow, that's a different way to approach art. It wasn't until the following year, I moved to Victoria, British Columbia, I lived there for a year and did artmaking. One of the pieces that came out of that was my first mixed media collage work. I really fell for [collage] there. When I got to grad school— I was trained in acrylic painting, so I was still trying to paint. My professors said, no, you're not going to do that here, and challenged me to do something else that was a little bit more explorative and expressive in terms of who I was. Collage was that answer. It filled that void and, for the most part, made that conceptual connection of relocation, removal, placing it within a whole new world. I was doing the Ho-Chunk history, the Ho-Chunk stories, and building Ho-Chunk narratives through that type of mentality or that way of looking at the art.

In grad school, I was having discussions that I didn't really know much about, and so, I really dove into art history and took way more art history classes than I needed to, but it opened me up into seeing like the Dadaists and the Futurists. My biggest influence was Kurt Schwitters, and these artists allowed me to see how to use collage from a political background. Or, like in Futurism: how do you depict or capture motion and this idea of looking at the world through a car window. Native Futurism is a big thing nowadays, and it totally has to do with technology, and I thought I was a Native Futurist long before, but I guess I'm not. I don't do anything with technology but utilize the vehicle and how that was a connection to the Futurists and the way they were referencing the vehicle, Or, *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912), Marcel Duchamp, the different artists that were questioning what is art. Collage spoke to me about that. Just having random images that made sense to me but allowed the viewer to make up their own story, that's where I like to sit sometimes in terms of artmaking. That's really interesting.

A number of your pieces contain images of a Winnebago RV, and it occurs in a lot of different contexts. What does the RV mean to you?

I like to think of it as the stand-in for not only the tribe, but as a self-portrait. That's the clearest answer I can give, in terms of what it represents. I like the humor aspect of it, when people look at it, and they have to put it together: my people are federally recognized as the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska. They're automatically drawn in — in a humorous way — a little joke. You make a joke to break the ice, and then the conversation can start within themselves. It always comes back to their personal interpretation of what the Winnebago is. They'll give, you know, the story, we had a Winnebago, it sat in the driveway six years, we never went anywhere... so there's these funny stories that come out of this. Then I get to tell them that's not my experience, and I get to lay 200 years of history on them, you know, in a 5-to-10-minute conversation. They walk away understanding a little bit more about these words, these names, what these things represent. It may spark a little more in them to know more. What is a Winnebago? Why is it named Winnebago? It's an educating process for me as well, and so I think of it as that. More recently, it's just been a self-portrait and allowing me to have a little bit more fun.

Winnebago Camp 2019

Seventh Generation (Winnebago) 2023

I like that you take a [toy] Winnebago with you when you travel, too. Because I follow you on Instagram, I know that if you're going somewhere, then the Winnebago is going somewhere as well.

There's a lot more that I don't show in terms of those little photos, not every little place has to have a photo, but it does.

You've described your work as creating an indigenous cartography. How are you thinking about this idea in your practice?

The idea for that came out in grad school, and it's one of those things, another one of those things where they challenged me to make work, and for myself, personally, my work is, cyclical. It bleeds into other bodies of work, and they all feed one another. I might work on paper at one moment, but then the execution of the idea may not fit that, so I change it to for example, the works on wool. That's where that whole idea of found objects and site-specific materials came into play. It wasn't until grad school that I took a cartography class, and it was about how colonialism has spread over these different areas. You know, that the sun never sets on the British rule. These kinds of different things that other indigenous peoples have had to relate within colonialism, and so it brought these ideas of how can I make work about the indigenous narrative? How can I express that through materials and symbols and colors? It was Gerald Vizenor, he's a Chippewa author, and he had this idea, this concept that was, he coined "Native transmotion." It was about how indigenous people can move through time and space. The examples that he used were mnemonic devices found within birch bark scrolls or etched into rocks, these things can have more meaning, and they can also bring up the people who were there, the place and the place name, for example, like the original word for Minnesota is "MniSota Makoche": the land that reflects the sky. So that's a place name, and you can go to a place and find these different concepts within those mnemonic devices and symbols, and that's where the inspiration came from. It was mainly about how can I develop my own Ho-Chunk narratives within that type of realm, using that composition. I borrowed from different mapmaking ideologies from birch bark scrolls to etching on rocks, pictographs, petroglyphs, and utilizing them in that same kind of regard, transporting you there. I think it's a body of work that I'm constantly going back to, just because I feel like it's important for me to continue to make work that is beyond just figurative work or representational work, but also can add a deeper meaning to it. The works on wool are where that's at right now: the superimposition, the historical superimposition from wrapping wool. The conceptual connection of GI-issued [infected] blankets. Basically, the idea is covering up the entirety of a previously established perspective. I'm trying to converse with all of them—symbols, colors, mnemonic devices that I'm utilizing.

You've also crafted a canoe that is on view in the Kyle J. and Sharon Krause Atrium. Tell me more about this piece.

That work has been in utero. I did a residency in 2019 and found out some of these projects take more time, need more space, need more background and thinking. I wanted to make an object that relayed a historical narrative. Before we got our reservation, we were relocated to Crow Creek, South Dakota in 1863 and when we got there it was flat and desolate. People were starving and dying. From our oral histories I know they cut down cottonwood trees and made dugout canoes and went south on the Missouri River past Fort Thompson to the Omaha reservation here in northeastern Nebraska and set up camp there. That's our plight. Due to the exhaustion of being removed so many times we made canoes and just left. I wanted to make something that conversed with that history. So, the concrete and papier-mâché— that's a heavy object that can't go anywhere. It's meant to be immovable, we're kind of stuck here on the reservation due to history and treaties. This is who we are as the Ho-Chunk people; we're the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska. Or the Ho-Chunk Niisoceja Haci: The Ho-Chunk who live on the muddy river. So that's who we are historically now. There's a separation between the tribes of the Ho-Chunk in Nebraska and the Ho-Chunk who live in Wisconsin. Our separation is merely geographical. We're still the same people. We still practice the same things and still speak the same language. We're just separated by geography. So, I want to make something that talks about that staying here, and who we are here is just as important. I think historically when we were done with the canoes we'd bury them in the creek beds—weigh them down with rocks and then bury them until the next year so they don't rot and warp. To make that kind of petrified look of a canoe that can't go anywhere. I think that's a big part of my work, like *No Place Like Home* (2024), the Dorothy slippers. We are not able to click our heels and

go back to our homeland. And its something nostalgic that when I do go back to Wisconsin, I love it there, but I know that my people have been here for the last 200 years. We're kind of attached to these places. No matter what.

What is the meaning of the title of the show?
The title is *Aagakinąk Haciwi*. Aagaki is to be opposite. Nąk is a positional, so Aagakinąk is to be opposite—we're sitting opposite one another. Within our language we have positionals, so there's the standing position, seated position, and the moving/lying position. Our language is based on our perception of how we see things. Haciwi: Haci is a house, so it means to be living opposite one another. I wanted to have that as an Iowan, as a Nebraskan. I'm on opposite sides of a river of my own homeland in Nebraska and being born here in Sioux City, Iowa. It allows me to take up that kind of living space. That can apply to a lot of things— being opposite one another, living opposite one another.

Do you think that this is also a metaphor for your work? The way you juxtapose things in your work so they're living opposite each other?
That's one of the reasons I wanted the show to be titled this way. Another way I initially thought of it was that we've dealt recently with the passing of our relatives. It goes into the next world. That kind of landed its way to there's a river. Or the space between the Wisconsin and Nebraska Ho-Chunks. There's a lot of ways to read into that expression, and I wanted it to be kind of open. As Iowans and Nebraskans or even Iowans and Iowans, we are all opposite one another. It doesn't mean that's a bad thing, I always see it as having common ground, but not really in the negative. When you say opposite that kind of brings that to mind a positive/negative thing, but I want to think of it as a positive.

Do you think that describes you too? Do you have pieces living opposite each other?

Oh yeah, I'm a big Gemini.

This interview was edited and condensed for clarity.

Standing Buffalo (A Reclining Winnebago) 2025

Our Service is Ceremony, Our Service is Sacrifice 2022

Superman Moving the Winnebago Back to Nebraska 2025

Belliqueux 2023

CHECKLIST

All works by Henry Payer (Ho-Chunk, born 1986).
Courtesy of the artist unless otherwise noted.

And Back 2023 (PAGES 2–3)
Oil, acrylic, pastel, chalk, street sign, fabric, carpet sample, cardboard, paper, stencil, food wrapper, magazine, children's book cutout, Boy Scout pamphlet, ledger paper, fabric tracing paper, library card, canvas and stamp on found objects
Overall: 22 1/2 x 33 3/4 in. (57.2 x 85.7 cm)

a [MUSE] IV 2025 (BACK COVER)
Paper bag, gold leaf, envelope, candy wrapper foil, aluminum foil paper, magazine, paper, book cover, wallpaper, charcoal and pencil on ledger paper
Frame: 12 x 10 in. (30.5 x 25.4 cm)
Sheet: 10 x 8 in. (25.4 x 20.3 cm)
From the collection of Kenneth G. Karol and Gregory A. French

Anthropocene Epoch 2022 (PAGE 14)
Acrylic, pastel, spray paint, paper, magazine, postcard, map, ledger book, polaroid and stamps on GI wool
Overall: 26 x 28 in. (66 x 71.1 cm)

Belliqueux 2023 (PAGE 25)
Paper bag, book cover, aluminum foil paper, paper, wallpaper sample, spray paint, charcoal and pencil on ledger paper
Frame: 21 1/4 x 25 1/8 in. (54 x 63.8 cm)
Sheet: 16 x 19 in. (40.6 x 48.3 cm)

Eponymous (Dozen Grey Wolves) 2019 (PAGE 13)
Acrylic, Prismacolor pencil, oil pastel, screen and pencil on ledger paper
Frame: 17 1/2 x 21 1/4 in. (44.5 x 54 cm)

Neutral Ground (Ioway) 2025 (PAGES 16–17)
Oil, Flashe, acrylic, charcoal, pencil, Prismacolor pencil, oil pastel, paper, stamp, fabric and wax paper on GI wool
Overall: 15 1/4 x 24 in. (38.7 x 61 cm)

No Place Like Home 2024 (PAGE 7)
Paper bag, gold leaf, aluminum foil paper, spray paint and glitter on ledger paper
Frame: 22 x 18 in. (55.9 x 45.7 cm)
Sheet: 15 1/2 x 10 1/2 in. (39.4 x 26.7 cm)

Our Service is Ceremony, Our Service is Sacrifice 2022 (PAGE 23)
Oil, acrylic, paper, postcard, photograph, magazine, cigarette carton, fabric, stamps, chalk, pencil and pastel on GI wool
Overall: 24 1/4 x 26 in. (61.6 x 66 cm)

Seventh Generation (Winnebago) 2023 (PAGE 20)
Ledger paper, aluminum foil paper, foil, photograph, paper, acrylic, charcoal and pencil on canvas
Canvas: 28 x 17 1/4 in. (71.1 x 43.8 cm)

Standing Buffalo (A Reclining Winnebago) 2025 (PAGE 22)
Paper bag, book cover, paper, envelope, foil paper, spray paint, Flashe, charcoal and Prismacolor pencil on ledger paper
Frame: 27 1/2 x 39 in. (69.9 x 99.1 cm)
Sheet: 16 1/2 x 34 in. (41.9 x 86.4 cm)

Superman Moving the Winnebago Back to Nebraska 2025 (PAGE 24)
Flashe and acrylic on BFK Rives paper
Frame: 24 1/4 x 30 1/4 in. (61.6 x 76.8 cm)

The Matriarchy 2025 (PAGE 4)
Birch bark, paper bag, newspaper, book cover, envelope, note, cardboard, spray paint, oil pastel, Conté crayon, Prismacolor pencil and Flashe on ledger paper
Frame: 25 1/4 x 38 in. (64.1 x 96.5 cm)
Sheet: 18 x 31 in. (45.7 x 78.7 cm)

The Wandering Winnebago No5 2025 (PAGE 8)
Postcard, paper, cardstock, food wrapper, stamp, wrapping paper, fabric, book cover, paper bag, envelope, ration stamp, oil pastel, pencil, Prismacolor pencil, charcoal and acrylic on ledger paper
Sheet: 10 1/2 x 15 1/2 in. (26.7 x 39.4 cm)

Under the Cover of Darkness They Danced 2022 (PAGE 11)
Oil, acrylic, pastel, stamps, paper and beadwork on USAF wool
Overall: 19 1/4 x 20 1/4 in. (48.9 x 51.4 cm)

Waac = Canoe 2025
Papier-mâché, cardboard, concrete and chicken wire
109 x 22 in. (276.9 x 55.9 cm)

What Separates Us Connects Us 2018 (PAGE 10)
40 x 50 in. (101.6 x 127 cm)
Checks, stamps, paper, image transfer, ledger paper, maps, calico fabric, comic book, magazine, bracelet, postcard, screen, book pamphlet, report card, book cover, lien, food wrapper, oil paint, oil pastel, prismacolor pencil, acrylic paint, conte crayon and pencil on USAF wool

Winnebago Camp 2019 (PAGE 19)
Ledger paper, aluminum foil paper, paper, paper bag, foamcore, matboard, spray paint, oil pastel, Prismacolor pencil, charcoal, acrylic and pencil on canvas
Canvas: 28 x 33 in. (71.1 x 83.8 cm)

Winnebago Lodge NoIV 2025 (FRONT COVER)
Birchbark, gold leaf, paper, envelope, food wrapper, stamp, ration stamp, newspaper, paper bag, Flashe, charcoal, acrylic, Prismacolor pencil and spray paint on ledger paper
Frame: 9 x 11 in. (22.9 x 27.9 cm)
Sheet: 8 x 10 in. (20.3 x 25.4 cm)
From the collection of Kenneth G. Karol and Gregory A. French

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Aagakinąk Haciwi: We Live Opposite Each Other

January 17 – June 17, 2026
Des Moines Art Center

Organized by Associate Curator Elizabeth Gollnick, Ph.D.
in collaboration with Henry Payer

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COVER IMAGE
Winnebago Lodge NoIV 2025

BACK COVER IMAGE
a [MUSE] IV 2025

More about Henry Payer at
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