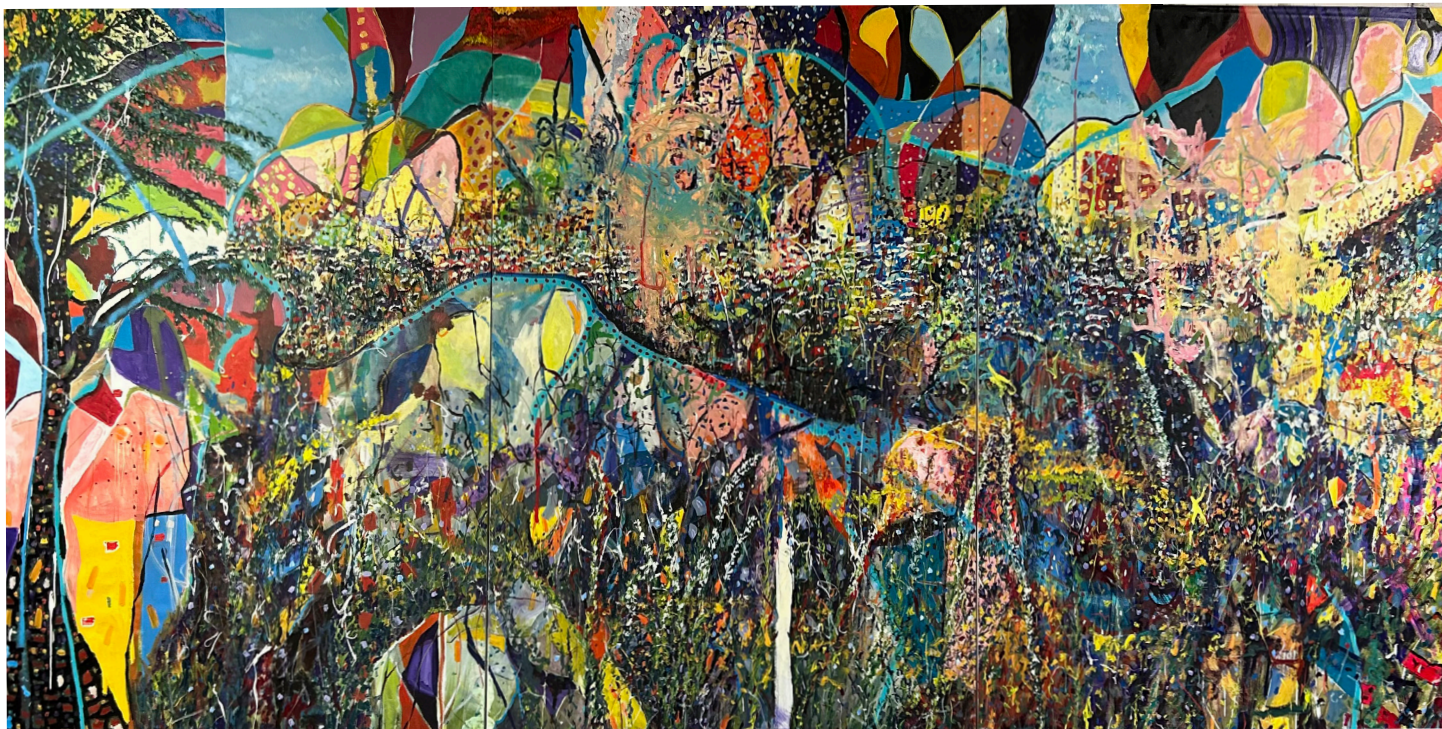


Jay Carrier,
Niagara it's Great to be Here.

January 24–April 5, 2025



Niagara it's Great to be Here, 2024, oil on canvas on wood, 8' x 18'

Beautiful Ambivalence

Curatorial Essay by Shirley Verrico

Jay Carrier makes art with bold colors and exuberant gestures inspired by Niagara Falls, New York, where he lives and works. Born on Six Nations Reserve to Onondaga and Tuscarora parents, Carrier creates work that is informed by his Native American heritage. He delves into the profound dualities of his life as an Indigenous artist, navigating the juxtaposition between the complexities of contemporary urban life and his deep spiritual and physical connection to the surrounding landscape. Through expressive abstractions of water and land placed alongside found object assemblages, Carrier offers an

expansive narrative about the mighty Niagara River—a source of sustenance, spirituality, and community for Indigenous peoples, as well as a resource reshaped and exploited under the pressures of late-stage capitalism.

Niagara it's Great to be Here. is the final exhibition for Buffalo Arts Studio's *Waterfront View*, a series of exhibitions, workshops, and panel conversations that examine how late-stage capitalism has shifted the view of water and waterways from a resource of collective benefit to a commodity of individual interest and shareholder profit. Carrier's paintings and mixed-media works reveal the environmental and societal



Niagara it's Great to be Here, 1989, oil on canvas, 24" x 24"

impacts of industrialization on the Niagara region in general, including the city of Niagara Falls.

The ten paintings in this exhibition explore Carrier's own ambivalence towards his hometown. The earliest and smallest work in the show is Carrier's 1989 self-portrait, also titled *Niagara it's Great to be Here*. The canvas is smaller than Carrier's later work, only 24" x 24" and shows the subject wearing a hazmat suit and respirator. The repeated skulls at the bottom and oil cans on each side convey Carrier's concerns of contamination and toxicity. In the background and partially hidden by the figure, is the phrase that was ubiquitous in the late 1980's. According to Carrier:

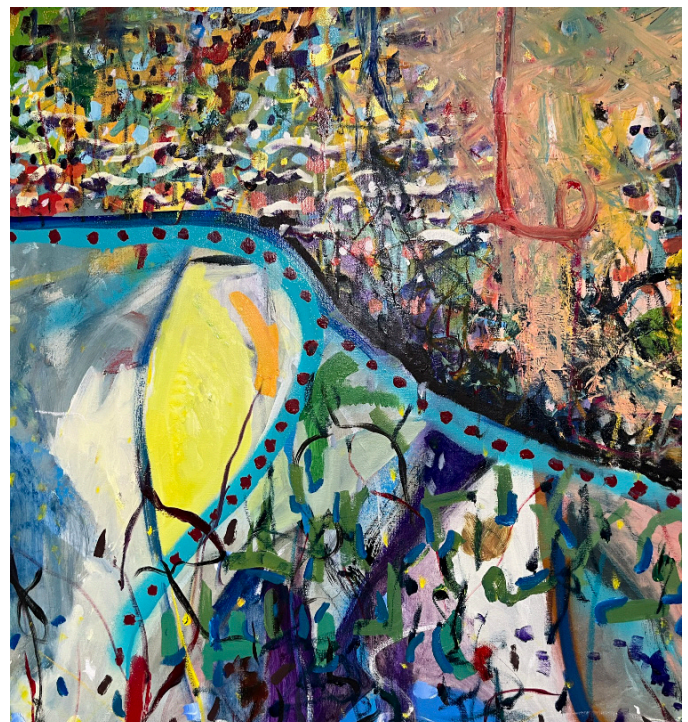
Niagara it's Great to be Here references a sign I saw in the 1980s on a chemical tank along the Robert Moses Parkway. It was ironic—given the documented history of pollution in the area—that the sign suggested such a warm welcome. This title also reflects my love and life alongside the Niagara River and Gorge.

A prolific artist with a studio filled with hundreds of paintings, drawings, and sculptures, Carrier



The Guardian of the Dead Trees, 2006, oil on canvas, 58" x 49"

has referenced the City of Niagara Falls and the Niagara Gorge repeatedly during his 45-year career. *The Guardian of the Dead Trees* (2006) moves toward the abstraction of Carrier's later work and includes the words *air*, *water*, *oil*, and *fire*.



Niagara it's Great to be Here, 2024, detail



Hometown BOOM, 2015, mixed media assemblage, 73" x 49"

Carrier's 2015 mixed media assemblage titled *Hometown BOOM* combines photographs, paintings, text, and found materials to create a layered and evocative commentary on urban decay, cultural memory, and environmental tension. The fruit border and nostalgic imagery contrast sharply with the stark warnings of danger and decay, all surrounding a painted depiction of Niagara Falls.

The Fishing Hole at the Whirlpool Stairs (2015) combines familiar objects and images with Carrier's gestural line work. The ceramic tiles across the top quarter of the composition and the strikingly naturalistic fish painted on top of them contrast sharply with the loose, expressive strokes used to articulate a spot dear to the artist. This division signifies the intersection of industrial influences with the natural world. Like so much of Carrier's work, this piece explores themes of environmental loss, cultural dislocation, and the tension between industry and nature.

Reflecting on these tensions, Carrier observes:

Most industries in Niagara were built along the river, exploiting its resources and discharging waste. Although environmental laws have since improved, the damage is already done. Now, it's up to us to confront and mitigate the consequences.

Carrier also celebrates the unique landscape carved by the Niagara River. *Path to the Gorge/ Medicine Piece* (2016) invites viewers to walk alongside Carrier and to experience the calm beauty he loves. The 2024 mixed media canvas *Niagara it's Great to be Here* is an exuberant expression of color and gesture. Against abstract shapes, Carrier builds a surface that suggests the trees and shrubs one might encounter along the shore. Spring growth appears as pops of green and white. A cerulean blue line meanders through the center of the composition, forking much as the Niagara River does at the tip of Grand Island. Dashes of gold paint run across the three panels like dappled sunlight through the trees. A branch loaded with lavender blossoms sways in the breeze. The scale of this massive 8 foot by 18 foot canvas shows us what the chemical tank could not—the Niagara that is indeed great.



The Fishing Hole at the Whirlpool Stairs, 2015, ceramic tiles and mixed media on wood panels, 49.5" x 49.5"



Path to the Gorge/Medicine Piece, 2016, mixed media on wood panel, 71.25" x 93.25"

Artist Biography

Jay Carrier holds a B.F.A. from the University of Illinois-Champaign, studied painting at The College of Santa Fe, New Mexico, and attended the M.F.A. program at the University of Illinois. Carrier has also exhibited nationally at venues including The Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe and the Everson Museum in Syracuse. His works are in the collections of The Burchfield-Penney Art Center; The Woodland Cultural Center Museum, Brantford Ontario; and The Iroquois Museum at Howes Cave, New York.

Buffalo Arts Studio remains committed to supporting artists like Jay Carrier, whose work critically engages contemporary issues of social, economic, and environmental justice. This programming reflects the belief that artists and curators can effect change through collaborations that balance community need with artistic insight. By presenting exhibitions that inspire dialogue, Buffalo Arts Studio fosters cultural connections that engage diverse audiences across Western New York.

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