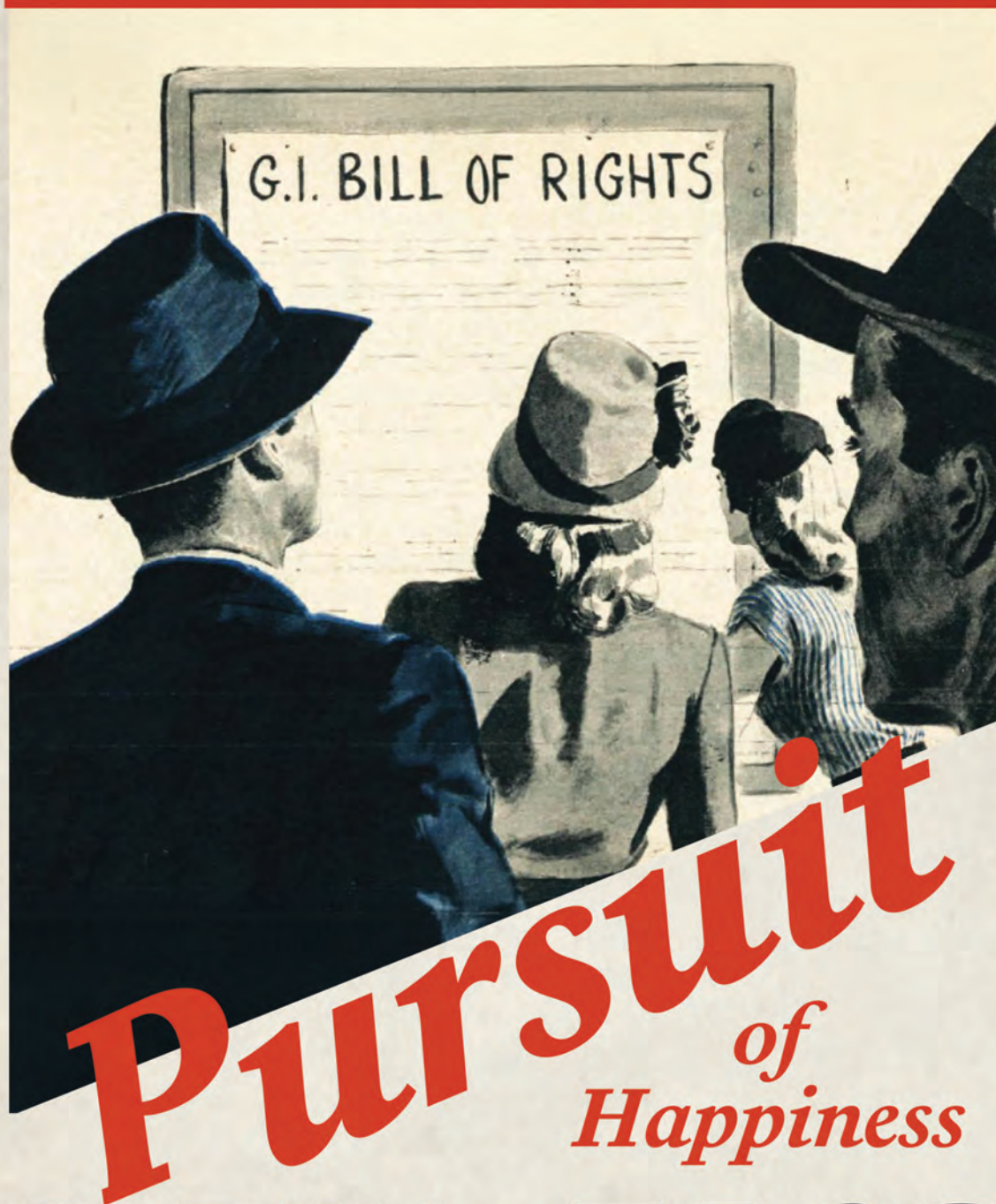


Teacher Guide



Pursuit *of Happiness* **GI Bill in TAOS**

27 SEP 2025 – 31 MAY 2026

Presented by HARWOOD MUSEUM OF ART

Harwood Museum of Art

EDUCATION RESOURCES



Harwood Museum of Art is pleased to announce our offerings for the 2025-2026 school year.

Incorporating art and music, students will experience how tuning into their emotions and drawing inspiration from the world around them can boost their creative confidence.

This guide offers a preview of the exhibition, as well as ways to integrate the tour into your classroom learning and **help prepare students for their visit.**

Key Questions:

- How did the GI Bill impact artists in Taos?
- How did artistic movements evolve after World War II?
- What is abstract expressionism, and why were post-war artists drawn to it?

NM Core Arts Standards:

Anchor Standard #1. Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard #11. Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.

SEL Competencies:

Self-awareness: The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.

Social awareness: The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts.

Bring the Harwood to your classroom.

We are now offering in-class visits that work as a standalone lesson or serve as an introduction for a visit to the museum. This year our visit focuses on the art of Eva Mirabal, a pioneering Native American artist from Taos Pueblo.

Visit the museum.

In this school tour, a Teaching Artist will lead students through the exhibition *Pursuit of Happiness: GI Bill in Taos*, showing how artists grappled with their own wartime experience during World War II, emerging into a new world where traditional rules of art had been thrown out the window.

A field trip to the museum allows you to enrich your class curriculum while offering students a chance to take an active role in their learning. Aligning all school visits with common core and SEL standards, we strive to encourage student voice, agency, and engagement in a supported learning environment.

Let us know how we can help you achieve your class goals!
Free for under 18, free for educators, free on Sundays.

Need assistance with transportation?

Bus grants are available on a first-come, first-served basis thanks to support from the Uplift Youth Fund by Taos Ski Valley, Inc.

Prepare for your visit:

A Harwood Teaching Artist will greet you at the entrance of the museum. Please note that backpacks, food, and water bottles are not allowed in the museum – a place to store these items will be provided. Visits are 1.5 hours and include time in the museum as well as a related artmaking activity in our education studio. We require one adult chaperone per 10 students.

Questions?

education@harwoodmuseum.org

**Book Your
Tour Today**

harwoodmuseum.org/art/education/

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND



Pursuit of Happiness: The Law That Changed America

The GI Bill, officially the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, was a massive wave that swept through American society. It was the first government program to provide comprehensive support, providing education benefits, loans for homes and businesses, unemployment insurance, and readjustment allowances. Nearly eight million of the sixteen million veterans who qualified for the GI Bill used the educational benefits. GIs became veterinarians, engineers, lawyers, journalists, and artists. The GI Bill allowed for postwar geographic, social, and economic mobility.

Before the war, artists were not taken seriously in the United States. Taos was an exception, a place where artists were valued members of the community. Taos has benefitted from its location, attracting GI generation artists from across the US and the world. *Pursuit of Happiness* explores how a generation of veteran artists brought new life to Southwest art and how Taos became a fertile ground for postwar creativity. Most of the work in the *Pursuit of Happiness* exhibition is from Harwood Museum's permanent collection, including many rarely seen works. We also seek to honor our modern veteran community, who make up 6.2% of the Taos population, through creating a space in the museum where veterans can contribute personal memorabilia to share their stories.

Artistic Influences

Abstract Expressionism

The generation of artists in this exhibition were marked by the Great Depression, World War II, and the first atomic bomb. Each asked the question: how to make art in these circumstances?

The dominant artistic movement in the 1940s and 1950s, Abstract Expressionism was the first time New York City became the center of an international art movement. Artists retained their individual styles, but desired to create art that placed emotion and personal convictions over realism. They championed bold, gestural movements, often going beyond the easel to use large painted canvases. Also referred to as the New York School, or “action painting.”



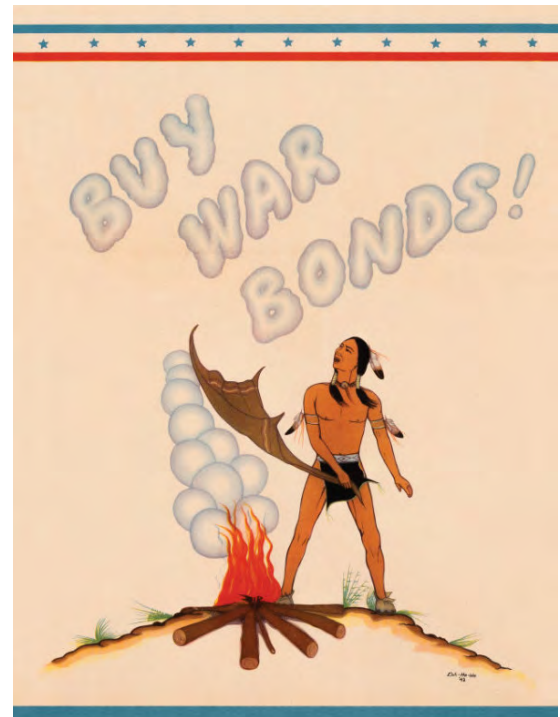
Left to right: Richard Diebenkorn, Untitled, 1951, oil on canvas, 55 7/8 x 43 inches. Gift of the Artist to UNM Art Department, University of New Mexico Art Museum, Albuquerque, 51.11. • Eva Mirabal [Eah-Ha-Wa], Buy War Bonds, 1942. offset poster 19 3/4 x 16 1/8 inches Earl Jones Jr. Museum of Art, University of Oklahoma, Norman, The James T. Bialac Native American Collection. In her final year at the Santa Fe Indian School, Mirabal's poster won a contest by the US Treasury Department to encourage the purchase of war bonds.

The art of this generation changed the history of art.

Jazz

Jazz music had an enormous influence on the visual arts in the 20th century. What about jazz that led to this impact? In a 1913 newspaper article, jazz was defined as having many meanings, “like life, energy, effervescence of spirit, joy, pep, magnetism, verve, ebullience, courage, happiness.”¹

Like the post-war modern art movements, jazz was not a European import, but a style born from the African American tradition, nurtured during the Harlem Renaissance. The rich sounds, rhythms and colors as well as the improvisation – composing in the moment – inspired many artists featured in the exhibition.



¹ <https://gagosian.com/quarterly/2025/02/21/essay-painting-jazz/>

Oli Sihvonen (1921-1991)

Oli Sihvonen was an influential abstract painter known for his use of vibrant colors and geometric shapes. A child of Finnish immigrants raised in Norwich, Connecticut, he attended the Arts Students League in New York City before enlisting in the army. A sergeant in the US Army's 603rd Camouflage Battalion, known as the Ghost Army, they landed in Normandy with Allied troops and conducted missions of deception on the western front. After the war he was a student at Black Mountain College and attended the Taos Valley Art School on the GI Bill. Sihvonen's work played a significant role in the Taos art community. His pieces often explored themes of abstraction and color, creating visually striking compositions that captured the essence of modernist experimentation. His contributions to the Taos art community have left a lasting impact, inspiring future generations of artists to push the boundaries of their creativity.



Left to right: Oli Sihvonen and Miriam (Mim) Sihvonen, Paris, 1945, photograph. Courtesy of Jennifer Sihvonen • Eva Mirabal drawing her first G.I. Gertie cartoon. Photo by AAF Service Command. Published in New Mexico Magazine (July 1944). Jonathan Warm Day Coming and Christopher Gomez.



Eva Mirabal

(Eah Ha Wa "Fast Growing Corn," Taos Pueblo) (1920-1968)

One of the first Native American women artists to gain national recognition, Eva Mirabal utilized the GI Bill to attend the Taos Valley Art School, furthering her education and artistic career, creating vibrant and dynamic compositions. Mirabal's work reflects her deep connection to her cultural heritage, blending traditional Native American themes with contemporary styles. Her contributions to the art world were groundbreaking, navigating the challenges of being a female Native American artist in a predominantly male-dominated field. As a youth Mirabal attended the Santa Fe Indian boarding school in Santa Fe where she studied in Dorothy Dunn's legendary painting program. She enlisted in the army in 1943, and her full-time assignment was painting several murals at the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio. She also created a cartoon titled G.I. Gertie, about a WAC (Women's Army Corps) who undermines military protocol.