

ART in Embassies Exhibition

UNITED STATES EMBASSY BANJUL, GAMBIA

COVER

*Phoebe Beasley*

***The Negro Speaks of Rivers*, 1998**

*Serigraph, 14 x 11 in. (35,6 x 27,9 cm)*

*Courtesy of the artist, Woodland Hills, California*

## The Creative Genius of Diversity

One of the greatest strengths of our nation is the rich diversity on which it is built and thrives. In selecting works for our art exhibition for Banjul we sought to highlight a diverse range of artists and the varied media which they have chosen to explore. Each of the works in the exhibition provides a wonderful vehicle for a journey into the creative genius of the artist.

Phoebe Beasley's series of six serigraphs made in collaboration with author Maya Angelou, pays homage to the Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes. Standing before them, especially *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*, one can almost hear the poet reciting his works as the artist has so wonderfully captured the stories that literally draw the viewer back in time.

Antonio Carreno's large piece titled *Abacus* is filled with the dramatic abstract representations that are characteristic of his work. This bold and colorful piece provides the viewer with something new and exciting each time he or she sees it. Carreno's use of acrylic and sand provides a subtle bas-relief texture to the work that is light but powerful.

Carolyn L. Mazloomi has immortalized the great Dizzy Gillespie in her quilt, *Gettin' Dizzy*. About choosing this medium, she says: "Quilts connect my spirit and soul to the music that has always been an element of my life." She has also connected us to the past, as I recall watching my grandmother and great-grandmother sew seemingly unconnected remnants of cloth into beautiful and functional bed covers that were themselves works of art.



Marie Watt's *Blanket Stories: Continuum (Book I/ Book III)* is a six color lithograph printed on natural Sekishu paper mounted on white Arches paper. Watt speaks of the many meanings and purposes of blankets – from their use for covering the body, to hanging them as tapestries. She has collected many stories about the blankets in the daily lives of friends and viewers. These words form the fabric of this unique and creative work.

Jacob Lawrence was one of America's great painters of urban life. Heavily influenced by the vibrant life he witnessed in the 1930s in New York during the Harlem Renaissance, Lawrence was as much an historian as an artist. Two of his works are included in the exhibition: *Builders –The Family* (1974) and

# The Creative Genius of Diversity

*Supermarket Flora*; the latter was created for New York's Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in 1997.

Sy Mohr is known for his large works in oil which capture the diversity of the people and places of the United States. *Monbegan Island* is a vibrant and lively depiction of people, nature, and architecture, filling the canvas with the richness of the country he loves.

Our sincere thanks to the artists and their galleries for their generosity in loaning these works to the Department of State's ART in Embassies Program, and to the Program's staff, and the GSO staff of Embassy Banjul for making this exhibition possible.

**Ambassador and Mrs. Barry L. Wells**

*Banjul  
June 2008*

## The ART in Embassies Program

The ART in Embassies Program (ART) is a unique blend of art, diplomacy, and culture. Regardless of the medium, style, or subject matter, art transcends barriers of language and provides the means for the program to promote dialogue through the international language of art that leads to mutual respect and understanding between diverse cultures.

Modestly conceived in 1964, ART has evolved into a sophisticated program that curates exhibitions, managing and exhibiting more than 3,500 original works of loaned art by U.S. citizens. The work is displayed in the public rooms of some 180 U.S. embassy residences and diplomatic missions worldwide. These exhibitions, with their diverse themes and content, represent one of the most important principles of our democracy: freedom of expression. The art is a great source of pride to U.S. ambassadors, assisting them in multi-functional outreach to the host country's educational, cultural, business, and diplomatic communities.

Works of art exhibited through the program encompass a variety of media and styles, ranging from eighteenth century colonial portraiture to contemporary multi-media installations. They are obtained through the generosity of lending sources that include U.S. museums, galleries, artists, institutions, corporations, and private collections. In viewing the exhibitions, the thousands of guests who visit U.S. embassy residences each year have the opportunity to learn about our nation – its history, customs, values, and aspirations – by experiencing firsthand the international lines of communication known to us all as art.

The ART in Embassies Program is proud to lead this international effort to present the artistic accomplishments of the people of the United States. We invite you to visit the ART web site, **<http://aiep.state.gov>**.

## Phoebe Beasley (born 1943)

“The original serigraphs (from a portfolio box set) are an outgrowth of a limited edition hand bound book depicting the poems of Langston Hughes, also accompanied by these serigraphs.

The title of the book, *Sunrise is Coming After While*, and the poems were selected by Dr. Maya Angelou. She also recommended me as the artist to depict Hughes’ poignant works. Additionally,

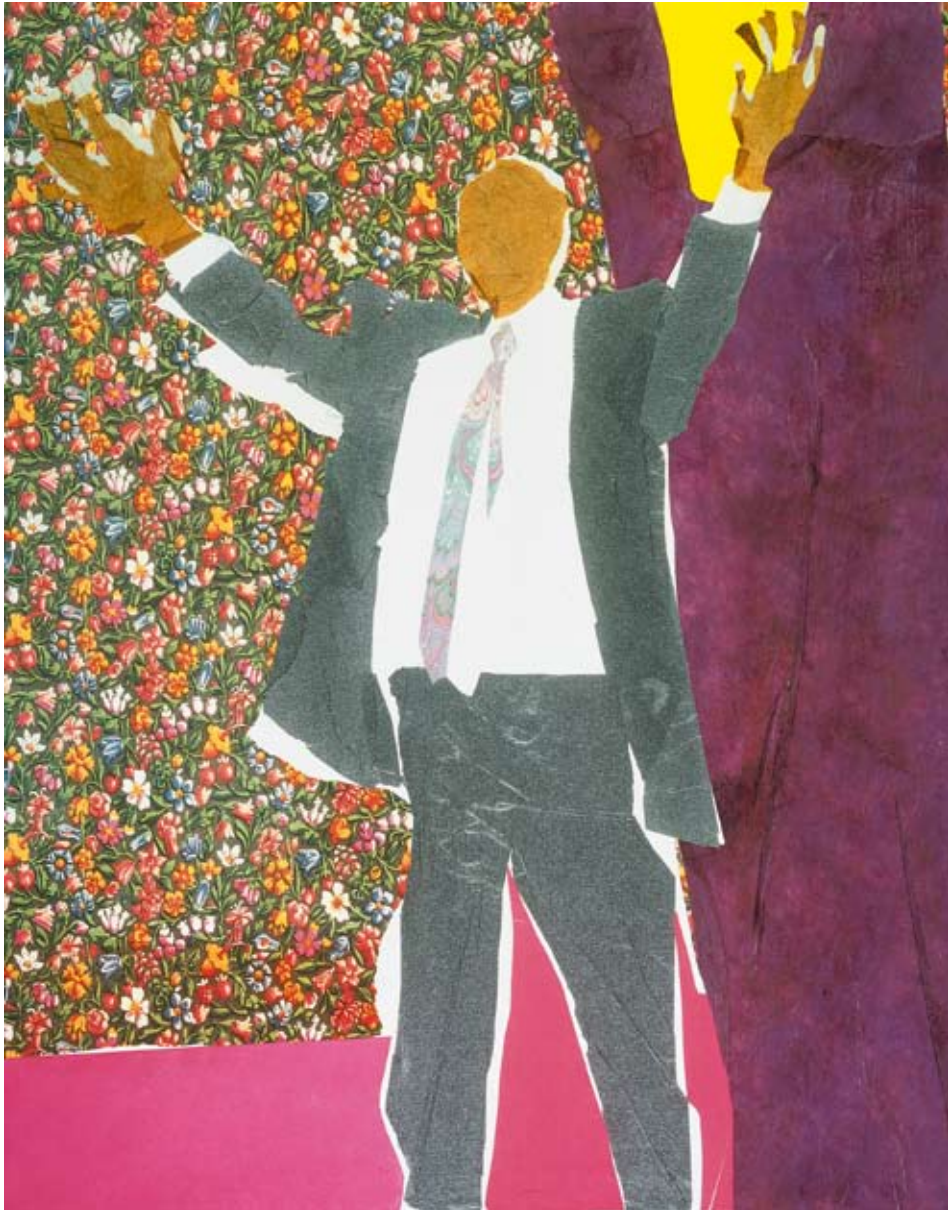
Dr. Angelou wrote the forward on Hughes and the afterward on me.

In 1998, with this project underway, I took a cruise to the Caribbean, and knowing Hughes had been a merchant marine, found myself on deck listening for *Langston, the seaman* to give me some direction.”

<http://www.phoebebeasley.com>



# Phoebe Beasley



## Dream Variations

To fling my arms wide  
In some place of the sun,  
To whirl and to dance  
Till the white day is done.  
Then rest at cool evening  
Beneath a tall tree  
While night comes on gently,  
    Dark like me, –  
That is my dream!

To fling my arms wide  
In the face of the sun,  
Dance! whirl! whirl!  
Till the quick day is done.  
Rest at pale evening...  
A tall, slim tree...  
Night coming tenderly.  
    Black like me.

Phoebe Beasley





## Mother to Son

Well, son, I'll tell you:  
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.  
It's had tacks in it,  
And splinters,  
And boards torn up,  
And places with no carpet on the floor –  
Bare.  
But all the time  
I've been a-climbin' on,  
And reachin' landin's,  
And turnin' corners,  
And sometimes goin' in the dark  
Where there ain't been no light.  
So boy, don't you turn back.  
Don't you set down on the steps  
'Cause you find it's kinder hard.  
Don't you fall now –  
For I've still goin', honey,  
I've still climbin',  
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

# Phoebe Beasley



## The Weary Blues

Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,  
Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,

I heard a Negro play.

Down on Lenox Avenue the other night  
By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light

He did a lazy sway ....

He did a lazy sway ....

To the tune o' those Weary Blues.

With his ebony hands on each ivory key

He made that poor piano moan with melody.

O Blues!

Swaying to and fro on his rickety stool

He played that sad raggy tune like a musical fool.

Sweet Blues!

Coming from a black man's soul.

O Blues!

In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone

I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan –

“Ain't got nobody in all this world,

Ain't got nobody but ma self.

I's gwine to quit ma frownin'

And put ma troubles on the shelf.”

Thump, thump, thump, went his foot on the floor.

He played a few chords then he sang some more –

“I got the Weary Blues

And I can't be satisfied.

Got the Weary Blues

And can't be satisfied –

I ain't happy no mo'

And I wish that I had died.”

And far into the night he crooned that tune.

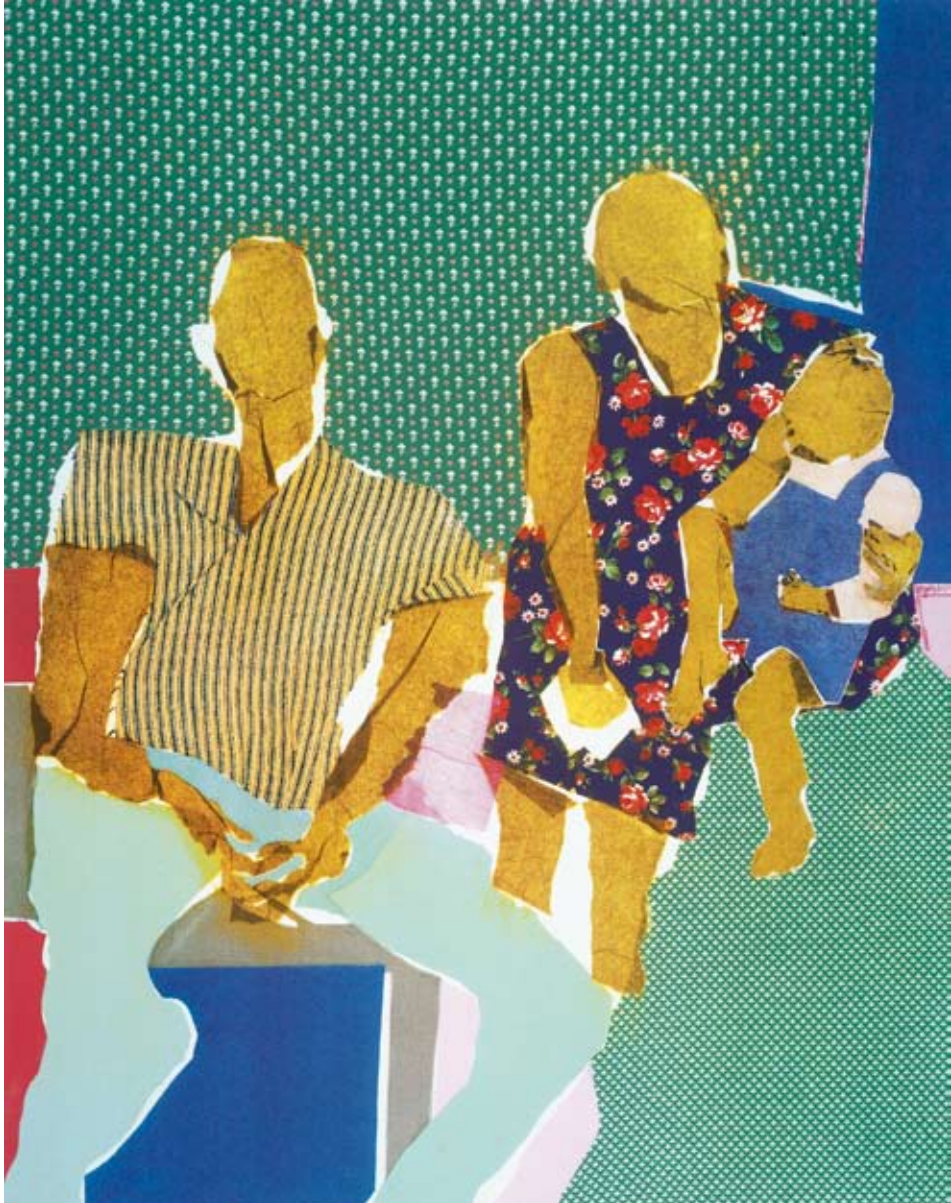
The stars went out and so did the moon.

The singer stopped playing and went to bed

While the Weary Blues echoed through his head.

He slept like a rock or a man that's dead.

Phoebe Beasley



## Aunt Sue's Stories

Aunt Sue has a head full of stories.  
Aunt Sue has a whole heart full of stories.  
Summer nights on the front porch  
Aunt Sue cuddles a brown-faced child to her bosom  
And tells him stories.

Black slaves  
Working in the hot sun,  
And black slaves  
Walking in the dewy night,  
And black slaves  
Singing sorrow songs on the banks of a mighty river  
Mingle themselves softly  
In the flow of old Aunt Sue's voice,  
Mingle themselves softly  
In the dark shadows that cross and recross  
Aunt Sue's stories.

And the dark-faced child, listening,  
Knows that Aunt Sue's stories are real stories.  
He knows that Aunt Sue never got her stories  
Out of any book at all,  
But that they came  
Right out of her own life.

The dark-faced child is quiet  
On a summer night  
Listening to Aunt Sue's stories.



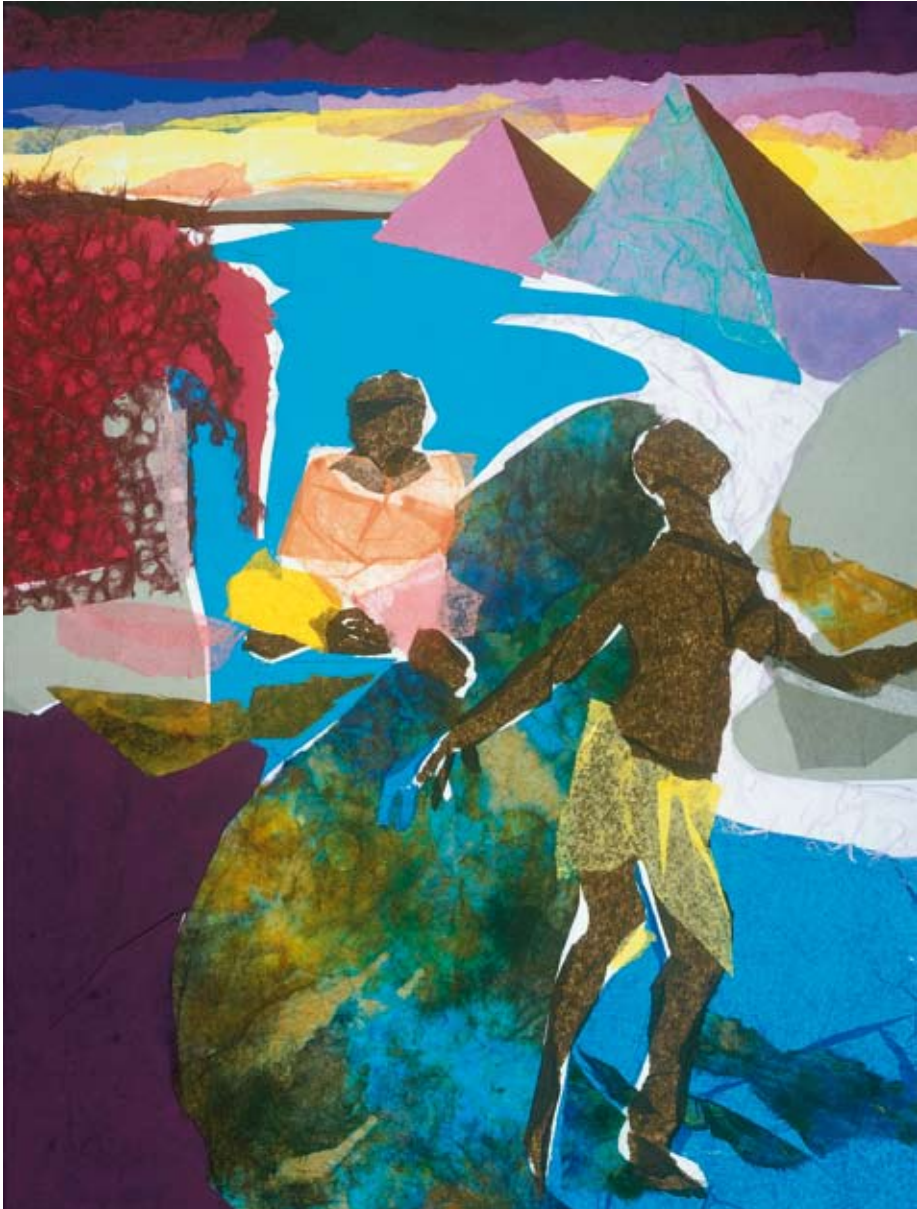
# Phoebe Beasley



## Daybreak in Alabama

When I get to be a composer  
I'm gonna write me some music about  
Daybreak in Alabama  
And I'm gonna put the purtiest songs in it  
Rising out of the ground like a swamp mist  
And falling out of heaven like soft dew.  
I'm gonna put some tall tall trees in it  
And the scent of pine needles  
And the smell of red clay after rain  
And long red necks  
And poppy colored faces  
And big brown arms  
And the field daisy eyes  
Of black and white black white black people  
And I'm gonna put white hands  
And black hands and brown and yellow hands  
And red clay earth hands in it  
Touching everybody with kind fingers  
And touching each other natural as dew  
In that dawn of music when I  
Get to be a composer  
And write about daybreak  
In Alabama.

Phoebe Beasley



## The Negro Speaks of Rivers

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow  
of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went  
down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom turn  
all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

## Antonio Carreño (born 1963)

“Antonio Carreño’s paintings burst with abstract vitality...With a rigorous academic background gained in his six-year program at the National School of Fine Arts, Santo Domingo, in his native Dominican Republic, and the Arts Students League, in New York City, Carreño was attracted to abstraction for the freedom it offered him. In this mode, he found he could let his conscious thoughts engage formal artistic qualities of color, line, and structure while his subconscious often took an unpredictable course.

One might not think of Carreño paintings as being inspired by nature but the artist prefers to paint outdoors. When weather prohibits this, his studio’s large windows offer an immediate proximity to the woods around his home ... in a rural setting outside of Newton, New Jersey. The artist states that many of the quick-drawn elements in his pictures come from nature. In these graphic notations we may see part of a tree, a leaf, clouds, etc. Such representational components appear to have been abstracted and many are now part of Carreño’s personal calligraphy.”

Steven H. Miller, Executive Director, Morris Museum, Morristown, New Jersey. “*The Paintings of Antonio Carreño*,” *Antonio Carreño: Manumission*, Parish Gallery, Washington, D.C., 2004

<http://www.parishgallery.com>

*Abacus*, 2004. Mixed media and acrylic, 62 x 42 in. (157,5 x 106,7 cm)  
Courtesy of the artist and Parish Gallery, Washington, D.C.





## Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000)

Jacob Lawrence was a great American modern painter of history and urban life. His paintings are a unique blend of sensibilities – part mural painting, part social realism, and part modernist abstraction.

In 1962 and 1964 Lawrence traveled to Africa, lecturing and teaching in Nigeria. There he created elaborately patterned paintings of village life in a post-colonial country. Throughout the 1970s, 1980s,



***Builders – The Family***, 1974. Silkscreen, 30 x 22 in. (76,2 x 55,9 cm)

*Gift of the Foundation for Art and Preservation in Embassies to the ART in Embassies Program, Washington, D.C.*

## Jacob Lawrence

and 1990s, Lawrence committed himself to commissions, especially murals and limited edition prints, for the benefit of non-profit organizations, including

New York's Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, for which *Supermarket Flora* was created.



***Supermarket Flora***, 1997. Silkscreen, 30 x 22 ¼ in. (76,2 x 57,8 cm)

Gift of the Foundation for Art and Preservation in Embassies to the ART in Embassies Program, Washington, D.C.



## Dr. Carolyn L. Mazloomi

“Quilts connect my spirit and soul to the music that has always been an element of my life. The words of a song, the emotion in a singer’s voice, or the rhythm of music can inspire a new quilt. None of the quilts are planned; they just give birth to themselves. Quilts are my equivalent to making music; I never know the final result. Much like the jazz instrumentalist who improvises his music with such radically eloquent

rhythms, quilts have vibes all their own. Quilts are visual soul food and I hope the viewer can feel the spirit of the cloth.”

<http://www.carolynlmazloomi.com>



*Gettin' Dizzy*, 2003  
Quilt, 57 ½ x 43 ½ in.  
(146,1 x 110,5 cm)  
Courtesy of the artist,  
West Chester, Ohio

## Sy Mohr (born 1923)

Sy Mohr is a contemporary American painter best known for large mural-like depictions of people, their architectural environs, and activities. His paintings celebrate the cultural and ethnic diversity of people in many parts of the world. Nearly always the people are set in a place – be it a city, town, or neighborhood – that speaks of them as richly as their clothing, shapes, complexions, races, groups, gender, and expressions.

Mohr's paintings stand in rebellion against the forces of conservative ethnocentrism, totalitarianism, hate, bigotry, holocaust, and war. Mohr paints a prototype of what the United States is at its best and must be in the future. And in the face of repression, depression, evil, prejudice, and the steel gray of poverty, crime, and despair in urban life, Mohr responds with a rainbow, an irrepressible *joie de vivre*, and a contagious love and acceptance of people.

*<http://www.symohrgallery.net>*



# Sy Mohr



*Monhegan Island*, undated.

Oil on canvas, 62  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 53  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (159,4 x 136,5 cm). Courtesy of the artist, Bowie, Maryland

## Marie Watt (born 1967)

“My work explores human stories and rituals implicit in everyday objects. Recently I have been exploring the history of common wool blankets. I am attracted to a blanket’s two- and three-dimensional qualities. On a wall, a blanket functions as a tapestry, but on a body it functions as a robe and living object. As I fold and stack blankets they begin to form columns that have references to linen closets, architectural braces, memorials (Trajan), sculpture (Brancusi, for one), the great totem poles of the Northwest, and the conifer trees with which I grew up.

In the native communities, including my own, the Seneca, we give blankets away to honor people for being witness to important life events – births, coming-of-age, graduations, marriages, namings, and honorings. For this reason, it is as much of a privilege to give a blanket away as it is to receive one.

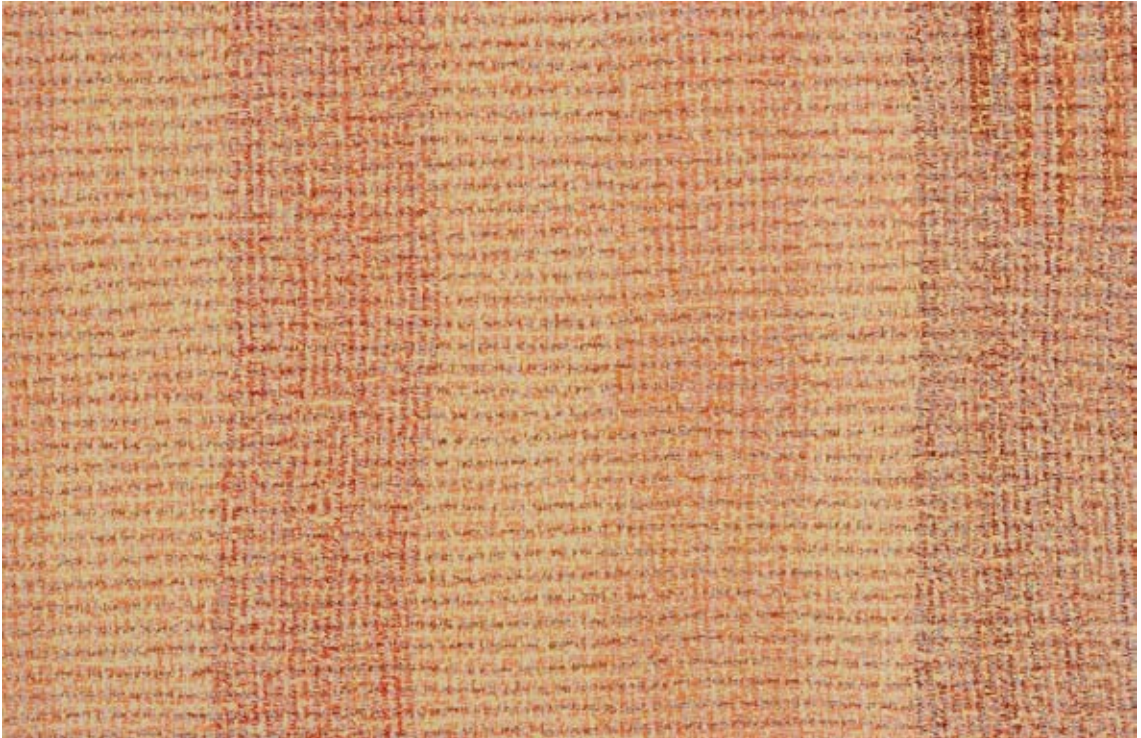
As friends come over and witness my blanket projects in process, I am struck by how the blankets function as markers for their memories and stories. Blankets hang around in our lives and families

– they gain meaning through use. Collecting observations through paper tags, audio, and blank books in which people share their blanket stories is a part of the object’s making and life.

In my recent Tamarind prints I was interested in transcribing the blanket story entries from the books which accompany my installations. My hope was to create a blanket of words, by transcribing each story into a warp and weft. The act of transcribing the stories was meditative and contemplative, perhaps not so different from the slowness which accompanies the act of weaving or the concentration that accompanies the telling of a story. The prints are named according to which exhibition that the books and their respective texts come from.

In this way, my work is about personal, social, and cultural histories imbedded in commonplace objects. I consciously draw from indigenous design principles, oral traditions, and personal experience to shape the inner logic of the work I make.”

# Marie Watt



***Blanket Stories: Continuum (Book I / Book III)***, 2007

Six-color lithograph printed on natural Sekishu paper mounted on white Arches paper, 15 ¼ x 22 ¼ in. (38,7 x 56,5 cm)

Courtesy of ART in Embassies Program, Washington, D.C.

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