

## CROSS-POLLINATION: FINLAND AND THE AMERICAN WEST

What does it mean to be human – to be a Finn, say, or an American? What distinguishes us one from another? And what unites us?

With the birth of the twentieth century, many people became fascinated by these questions. In Finland and the United States, people began to distance themselves from the monarchies that had ruled them and to delve into their histories prior to royal, largely foreign, influence. The American Arts and Crafts and the Finnish National Romantic Movements were born out of a common desire to reach beyond the tastes of kings and queens, to seek out a truer and simpler way of living in the world.

In Finland, artists and architects looked to Karelia and to ancient oral traditions and mythology, as immortalized in the epic *Kalevala*, compiled by Elias Lönnrot in the nineteenth century. In the American West, places like Taos, New Mexico, seemed to represent an original American aesthetic. The search was for an essence of who we are in a place, and included a new appreciation of the land – its unique topography and flora and fauna – as clues to our identity as common people.

In a remarkable cross-pollination of these cultural reforms, the great Finnish artist, Akseli Gallen-Kallela, traveled to Taos to work and learn with like-minded artists. From 1923 to 1926, he lived with his family in the artists' community of Taos. Victor Higgins and Walter Ufer, whose works are on loan here through the U.S. Department of State's office of ART in Embassies, and Santa Fe artist Sheldon Parsons, whose work has hung in this institution since the 1940s, were all colleagues of Gallen. They even went coyote hunting together one moonlit night.

The Ateneum has generously given the U.S. Embassy – for display in the Residence – beautiful state-of-the-art reproductions of the three Akseli Gallen-Kallela Taos works in its collection. Viewing the Finnish master's American images in the context of other Taos Society views we have found to be strangely moving.

Americans have a more complicated relationship to the Native American culture than perhaps Finland has to Karelian culture. *Galisteo: Patio II* was painted by Fritz Scholder, who grew up in South Dakota with no knowledge that he was one-quarter Luseino, a California Mission tribe, but embraced the culture – presenting it from his own unconventional perspective.

In more recent years, a Western artist named Rudy Autio of Montana was commissioned by *Reader's Digest* to design a *ryijy* weaving. *White Horses* was woven here in Finland by Anneli (Hartikainen) Marjoniemi in 1985. It took her four and a half months but Autio has always been listed as the sole artist. Applied arts and artisanship were highly valued in both the Finnish and American movements of self-discovery so it seems appropriate that Ms. Marjoniemi should be included in our thanks.

Rebecca DiDomenico lives and works in Boulder, Colorado, but her vision goes far beyond the geography of the West, connecting art and nature, history and poetry and, in *1000 Wings*, fauna to the mineral world, in this soaring yet intricate work that must be experienced rather than simply viewed.

We welcome you each to enjoy this remarkable exhibition in the spirit of "Cross-Pollination." Our cultures and our histories have much in common with limitless possibilities for the future through collaboration. We also want to thank ART in Embassies, Rebecca DiDomenico, Eeva Pinomaa, *Reader's Digest* of Finland, the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, and the University of Oklahoma for their generosity and effort on behalf of Embassy Helsinki.

Cody Douglas Oreck  
Ambassador Bruce J. Oreck

Helsinki, February 2011



Victor Higgins was born to a Shelbyville, Indiana, farm family, and his father encouraged his early interest in art. Higgins studied at the Art Institute of Chicago (Illinois), and the Academy of Fine Arts in Chicago, with additional studies in Paris and Munich. While in Paris he met fellow Chicago artist Walter Ufer, which not only led to a life-long friendship, but also to a vision of American art as having its own authentic style, rather than borrowing the nineteenth century academic style of European painting.

## VICTOR HIGGINS 1884-1949

**POPLARS AND YOUNG FIELDS, 1940s**  
*Oil on canvas, 30 x 22 in. (76.2 x 55.9 cm)*  
Courtesy of The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, The University of Oklahoma, Norman; Purchase of the Priscilla C. and Joseph Tate Collection, 2004

In 1914 Higgins and Ufer went to Taos, New Mexico, which at the time was an isolated village. The colorful life of its Pueblo people and its natural beauty drew a collection of artists, creating an art colony, from which the Taos Society of Artists was founded in 1915. The Society traveled art exhibitions around the country, introducing southwestern themes with great success. Higgins became a member in 1917, and remained one until the Society's dissolution in 1927. Other members included Joseph Henry Sharp, Bert Phillips, Ernest Blumenschein, Oscar Berninghaus, Irving Couse, and Walter Ufer.

Higgins is credited with bringing modernism to academic realism. He also changed his subject matter from genre scenes of Pueblo Indians to landscapes, and some still life and portrait work. Reflecting a strong cubist influence, his landscapes experimented with multi-point perspective and interlocking planes. In the 1940s, he painted "little gems," a series of small landscapes from a setup in the trunk of his car. His friend Ernest Blumenschein was known to have commented: "In them was the best Higgins quality, a lyrical charm added to his lovely color. . . . He always had, as do most good artists, an instinct that guided his form structure. . . . All works of love: love of his simple subjects and of his craftsmanship."

[www.victorhiggins.com](http://www.victorhiggins.com)



**RUDY AUTIO WHITE HORSES, 1991**  
*Hand woven pile wall hanging, 60 x 96 in. (152.4 x 243.8 cm). Courtesy of "Reader's Digest," Helsinki, Finland*

## RUDY AUTIO 1926-2007

Rudy Autio was born Arne Rudolph Autio to a family of Finnish immigrants in Butte, Montana. As a child, he took drawing classes from Works Progress Administration artists working in Butte. After serving in World War II, he studied art at Montana State University (then Montana State College) in Bozeman, and earned a Master of Arts degree from Washington State University in Pullman. In 1957 he started the ceramics department at the University of Montana in Missoula, where he taught for twenty-eight years.

The recipient of numerous awards, Autio is best known for his figurative ceramic vessels, but he also worked in a variety of other media, including bronze, concrete, glass, fabricated metal, and tapestry. A National Endowment grant in 1980 enabled him to work and lecture at the Arabia Porcelain Fac-

tory and the Applied Arts University in Helsinki, Finland. During this time, he obtained a commission from the University of Montana for its Cultural Center – a hand woven pile tapestry, called a *ryijy* in Finnish. The smaller, *Reader's Digest* version displayed here was made under the supervision of the artist.

Autio's work can be found in the permanent collections of museums around the world, including the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Massachusetts; the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City; the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; the Applied Arts Museum in Helsinki, Finland; and the National Museum in Stockholm, Sweden.

[www.rudyautio.com](http://www.rudyautio.com)  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudy\\_Autio](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudy_Autio)

## FRITZ SCHOLDER 1937-2005

Born in Breckenridge, Minnesota, Fritz Scholder is one the most famous Native American artists of the twentieth century, having excelled in painting as well as lithography, photography, monotype, and poetry. He began studying art with Oscar Howe, a noted Sioux artist, in high school. He studied at the University of Kansas, at Wisconsin State University, and with Wayne Thiebaud at Sacramento College in California, and at the University of Arizona in Tucson, where he earned a Master of Fine Arts degree in 1964.



Scholder always painted in series. In 1967 he began depicting the "real Indian," which became immediately controversial. Scholder was the first to paint Indians with American flags, beer cans, and cats. His work explored a loaded national cliché and the ongoing guilt of the dominant culture. Although Scholder was one-quarter Luseino, a California Mission tribe, he did not grow up as an Indian, and his unique perspective could not be denied.

By 1970 Scholder had become a major influence for a generation of Native American artists. The recipient of numerous awards, including the 2002 Arizona Governor's Award, he often lectured at art conferences and universities. His work is the subject of several publications, and his exhibition history extends throughout the United States as well as to Romania, Yugoslavia, Berlin, London, Switzerland, and Paris. In 2008-2009 The National Museum of the American Indian mounted a major retrospective shown concurrently in Washington, D.C. and New York City.

[www.fritzscholder.com](http://www.fritzscholder.com)

**GALISTEO, PATIO II, 1979**  
*Oil on canvas, 40 x 30 in. (101.6 x 76.2 cm)*  
Courtesy of Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, The University of Oklahoma, Norman; Purchase, Richard H. and Adeline J. Fleischaker Collection, 1996



## ART IN EMBASSIES

**ART** in Embassies (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 1963, 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 200 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.

ART in Embassies is proud to lead this international effort to present the artistic accomplishments of the people of the United States.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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### 1000 WINGS, 2000

Butterfly wings, mica, brass hinges, glass, and crystal, 114 x 92 x 5 in. (289,6 x 233,7 x 12,7 cm)  
Courtesy of the artist, Boulder, Colorado

## REBECCA DIDOMENICO

Rebecca DiDomenico was born in Greenbrae, California. She attended school at Claremont College, California, and Tribhuvan University in Nepal, and ultimately received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English literature from the University of Colorado, Boulder. In DiDomenico's world, there is no separation between art and life, studio and home. Her work is concerned with the collision and interpenetration of various forms of nature, mythology, art history, and metaphysics. With her innate, relentless curiosity, DiDomenico casts the net of her imagination wide: "I am interested in unexpected relationships, the way a spider web mimics a wheel, the commonality between Dr. Seuss and the Dalai Lama, the resemblance between patterns in the constellations of the stars and the minute particles inside the body."

[www.DiDomenicostudio.com](http://www.DiDomenicostudio.com)



### INDIAN ON HORSEBACK WITH COLT, c. 1930

Oil on canvas, 16 x 20 in. (40,6 x 50,8 cm). Courtesy of Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, The University of Oklahoma, Norman; Purchase, Richard H. and Adeline J. Fleischaker Collection, 1996

## WALTER UFER 1876-1936

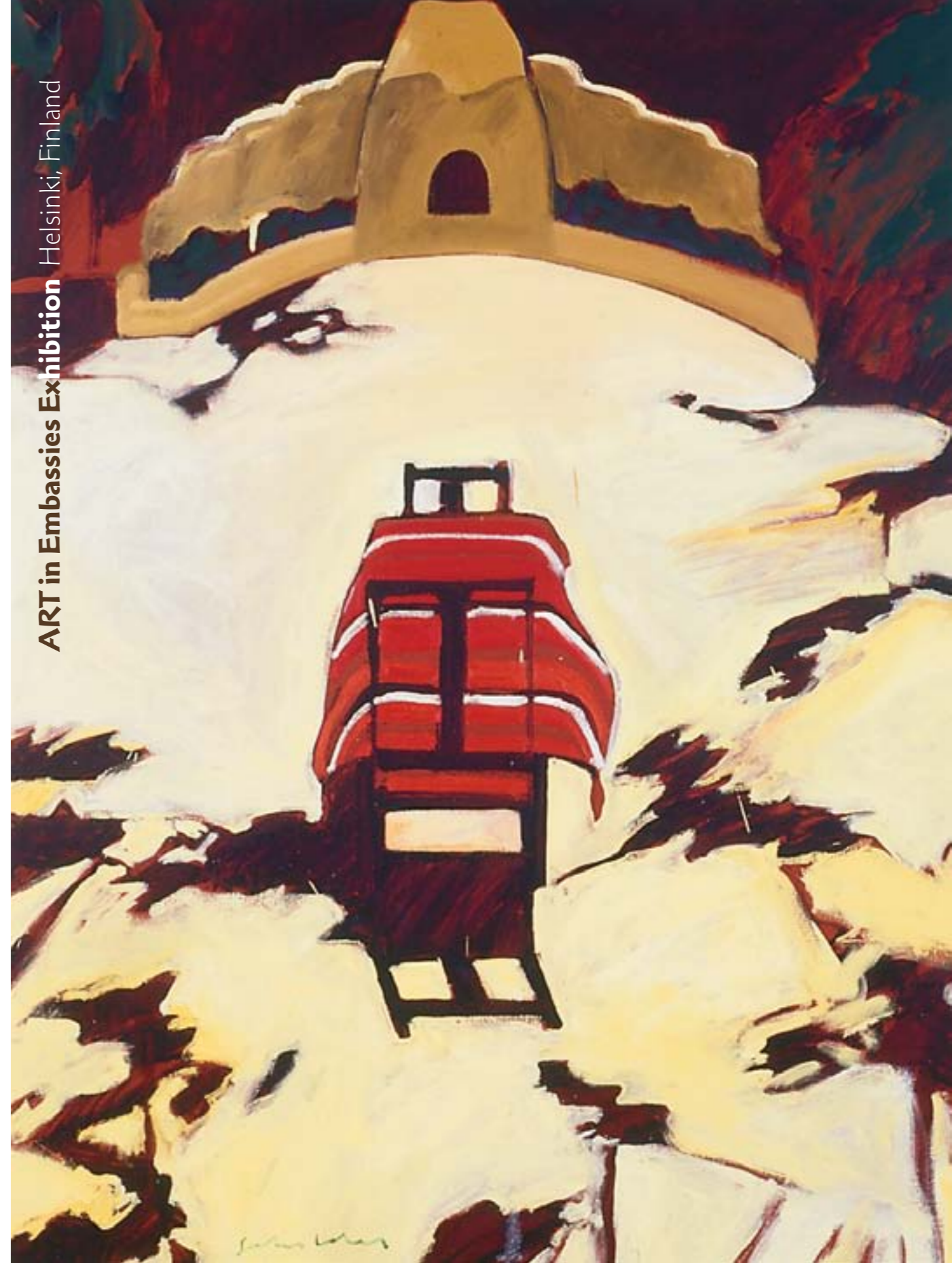
Born in Louisville, Kentucky, Walter Ufer was the son of German immigrants. After an apprenticeship with a Louisville commercial lithographer, he traveled to Dresden, Germany, to study at the Royal Applied Art Schools and the Royal Academy. After seven years abroad, during which he met J.H. Sharp, Ernest Blumenschein, and Victor Higgins, Ufer studied at the Art Institute of Chicago (Illinois).

In 1914 Ufer moved to Taos, New Mexico. The landscape was initially of some interest but it was the Pueblo Indians who fascinated him. A strong supporter of individual freedoms and a devout socialist (and friend of Leon Trotsky), he saw them as having been oppressed for centuries in such a manner as to erase their racial and cultural identity. These feelings of anger and despair were a continuing theme in Ufer's work. An alcoholic and depressive, he suf-

fered from crippling episodes of desolation, during which he was moody and unproductive. Otherwise warm and personable, he had many friends, and was an active member of the Taos Society of Artists.

During the 1920s, Ufer's work sold very well. In 1920 he won third prize at the Carnegie International, a breakthrough in prestige for the Taos Society of Artists and for him, and his prices soared. Apart from a disastrous experiment in 1923 (wherein Ufer, on the urging of his agent, made several paintings that never sold – all featuring the same Indian figure on a white horse against a background of Taos Mountain), he was generally successful until the stock market crash of 1929. Sadly, in destitution Ufer succumbed entirely to alcoholism.

[www.walterufer.net](http://www.walterufer.net)



ART in Embassies Exhibition Helsinki, Finland