



UNITED STATES EMBASSY, KINGSTON, JAMAICA  
ART in Embassies Exhibition

K E H I N D E W I L E Y

**Dwayne**, 2008

Oil on canvas, 26 x 22 in. (66 x 55.9 cm)

Courtesy of the artist and Julie and Bennett Roberts,  
Culver City, California

# ART IN EMBASSIES



Established in 1963, the U.S. Department of State's office of ART in Embassies (AIE) plays a vital role in our nation's public diplomacy through a culturally expansive mission, creating temporary and permanent exhibitions, artist programming, and publications. The Museum of Modern Art first envisioned this global visual arts program a decade earlier. In the early 1960s, President John F. Kennedy formalized it, naming the program's first director. Now with over 200 venues, AIE curates temporary and permanent exhibitions for the representational spaces of all U.S. chanceries, consulates, and embassy residences worldwide, selecting and commissioning contemporary art from the U.S. and the host countries. These exhibitions provide international audiences with a sense of the quality, scope, and diversity of both countries' art and culture, establishing AIE's presence in more countries than any other U.S. foundation or arts organization.

AIE's exhibitions allow foreign citizens, many of whom might never travel to the United States, to personally experience the depth and breadth of our artistic heritage and values, making what has been called a: "footprint that can be left where people have no opportunity to see American art."

*"The ART in Embassies program reveals the rich history and cultural heritage of the United States and the communal experiences that we share with peoples of different countries, backgrounds and faiths, binding us closer together. Through its temporary exhibitions and permanent collections, the ART in Embassies program intrigues, educates, and connects – playing an ambassadorial role as important as that served by traditional diplomacy."*

— Hillary Rodham Clinton  
Former Secretary of State

## I N T R O D U C T I O N

This exhibition includes art by established and mid-career African American and Caribbean American artists. Works by masters of the first generation – notably Lois Mailou Jones, Jacob Lawrence, Norman Lewis, and Sam Gilliam – offer a visual representation of the foundations of African American art. Contemporary works by Lorna Simpson, GA Gardner, Maya Freelon Asante, Ruben Ubiera, and Kehinde Wiley illustrate influences from their predecessors and more recent developments.

Just as the Harlem Renaissance was taking shape in 1923, Lois Mailou Jones had her first solo exhibition in New York City. By the 1930s her paintings, which incorporated African forms, helped to define the movement. Norman Lewis and Jacob Lawrence both grew up in Harlem, New York, during the Harlem Renaissance and into the Great Depression. The American government's Works Progress Administration (WPA) created the Federal Art Project (FAP), which in 1938 opened the Harlem Community Art Center. Lewis and Lawrence both took classes at the center and later worked for the WPA. While with the WPA, Lewis worked alongside Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock, who would later be part of the abstract expressionist group. During this period Lewis's paintings became more abstract and influenced generations to come. In the 1960s, while influenced by the abstract expressionists, Sam Gilliam also became associated with the Washington color school artists. During the Civil Rights Movement, Lois Mailou Jones became influential in the Black Arts Movement. Like the Harlem Renaissance, the Black Arts Movement included literature, music, and theatre in order to redefine personal identity and self perception through solidarity, racial pride, and political involvement.

By the 1980s, many African American artists began thinking about their identity in a multi-cultural society. Lorna Simpson, born in 1960, was influenced by the Civil Rights Movement and the struggle for equality. Her art uses photographs and text to produce narratives that examine gender, identity, and social dynamics.

Contemporary works from the last decade diverge from the traditional themes of African American art. Their experience is different, drawing influences from various artistic legacies. Maya Freelon Asante calls herself an “artivist,” an artist/activist. Her soaked tissue paper, bleeding with color, presents universal issues and personal memories through its reference to African American cultural traditions like quilt making. Caribbean American artists GA Gardner and Ruben Ubiera reflect on contemporary urban life and society by using visual language through a personal identity. Gardner uses his early life in Trinidad and Tobago to portray his current American surroundings through colors and textures. Ubiera’s mixed media works present social commentary on the human struggle that can be felt through his technique and subject matter. Jo Anne Jones’ narrative paintings use ambiguous related imagery to convey the complexity of relationships. Kehinde Wiley paints heroic images of African American males using elements of portraiture associated with the paintings of European masters. Wiley alludes to history, race, class, and power in contemporary youth culture and African-American identity.

These artists present aspects of the African American experience, evoking themes of daily life, community, belonging, and history, through imagery which spans social issues of identity, gender, race, and the nature of relationships in contemporary life. Their aesthetic explorations and viewpoints have enriched the history of American art and continue to redefine it in the twenty-first century.

**Imtiaz Hafiz**  
Curator

*Washington, D.C.*  
*April 2013*

MAYA FREELON ASANTE  
1982

“In 2005 I discovered a stack of brightly colored tissue paper tucked away in my grandmother’s basement. After unfolding the tissue, I noticed that water leaked onto the paper and left an intricate stain. This event inspired a shift in my creative process. Since then I have worked with ‘bleeding’ tissue paper, witnessing its deterioration. Tissue Ink Monoprints are created by saturating the tissue paper with water, thus releasing the ink from the fiber; the tissue is then pressed on to a heavy weight paper, which absorbs the bright ink permanently. The Tissue Ink Monoprints represent a recorded history of formation, which pays homage to the stains it now bears.

I contemplate global issues of war, poverty, waste, ageing and beauty, searching for what fuels our desire to preserve or protect. Giving reverence to my ancestors and meditating on the beauty of now, my art represents the freedom to create challenging work with an objective of universal peace and understanding. The peace starts with the community in which I’m sharing my work; interaction is ever present and essential.”

Maya Freelon Asante attended The American University in Paris, France in 2004, and in 2005 received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Lafayette College, Easton, Pennsylvania. In 2007 Asante received her Master of Fine Arts degree from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts.



**Migration**, undated. Tissue and ink, 29 x 20 in. (73.7 x 50.8 cm)  
Courtesy of the artist, and Morton Fine Art, Washington, D.C.

# G A G A R D N E R

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“This body of work is a reconstruction and redirection of the energy resulting from the over saturation of media and its original intended target. My work is a visual representation of the proliferation of media and information in contemporary society and the resulting cacophony of messages it engenders. The goal of my work is to dissect and neutralize the white noise found in these forms of media; create cohesive stories that integrate my cultural background as an immigrant from Trinidad and Tobago living and working in the USA. I present a Caribbean aesthetic in my art by utilizing the colors, textures, and environments as the lens through which I see urban contemporary life in America, weaving my cultural identity back into the fabric of our society.”

GA Gardner began his professional art career in New York City, creating and exhibiting large format 3D computer fine art in 1996. Gardner studied fine art at San Francisco State University, California, from which he earned both his Bachelor’s of Arts and Master’s of Art degrees. Gardner crafted mixed media art and animation at The Ohio State University, Columbus, where he earned a Ph.D. in Art Education in 1995. Gardner has served as a professor of art and animation at various universities, including William Paterson University (Wayne, New Jersey); University of the District of Columbia; and George Mason University (Fairfax, Virginia), and has been a lecturer at The Ohio State University.

<http://gagardner.com/>





G A G A R D N E R

**PPS 107**, 2010

Mixed media on wood, 24 x 20 in. (61 x 50.8 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, and Morton Fine Art, Washington, D.C.





GA GARDNER

**Green City**, 2010

Mixed media on wood, 40 x 48 in. (101.6 x 121.9 cm)

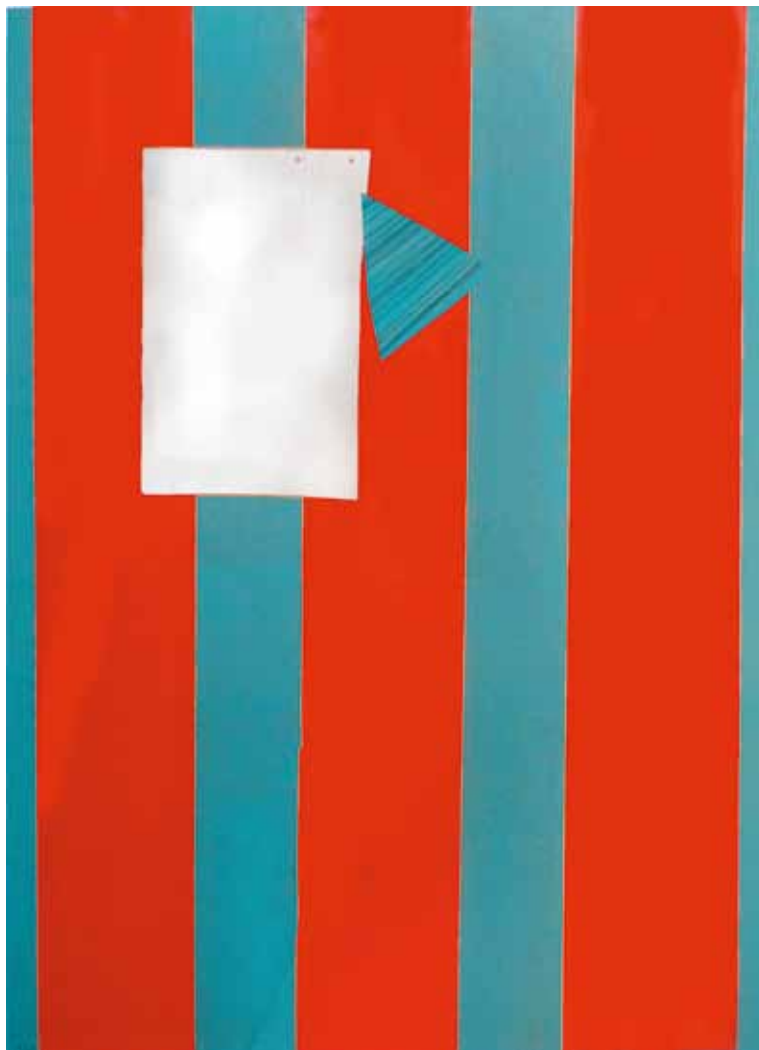
Courtesy of the artist, and Morton Fine Art, Washington, D.C.

# S A M G I L L I A M

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Since the early 1960s, Sam Gilliam has been recognized as an original and innovative color field painter. He has advanced the inventions associated with the Washington color school and abstract expressionism to a new level. Gilliam has redefined the techniques of these traditions and he continues to reinvent his ideas about making art. To his early works in the 1960s and 1970s on stretched, then draped, and more recently wrapped canvas, Gilliam added sculptural elements as extensions of his surface, thereby making uniquely shaped works. By 1980 he was applying sculptural elements to the surface, making three-dimensional sculptural paintings. Currently, he creates multimedia installations and employs brightly stained polypropylene, dozens of layers of painted and printed color, computer generated imaging, metallic and iridescent acrylics, hand-made paper, aluminum, steel, and plastic: Gilliam's art is an example of evolution through aesthetic exploration.

Gilliam was born in Tupelo, Mississippi, and attended the University of Louisville in Kentucky, from which he received his Bachelor of Arts degree in fine art and his Master of Fine Arts degree in painting. He has taught in Washington, D.C. public schools and in many prominent art schools and universities in Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Pennsylvania.



**Castle Banner 5, 2005**

Relief print on wood veneer with collage, 60 x 40 in. (152.4 x 101.6 cm)  
Courtesy of Bill Hodges Gallery, New York, New York

# J O A N N J O N E S

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Jo Ann Jones' narrative paintings and drawings negotiate the intricate space that oftentimes exists between memory and anxiety, while addressing the complex nature of relationships – be it our relationship to strangers, best friends or lovers. Jones studied at the University of Illinois and received her Master of Fine Arts degree from Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. She has received the Joan Mitchell Foundation Painting Award, fellowships at Skowhegan School of Painting, Maine, and the MacDowell Colony, Peterborough, New Hampshire. She is the chair of the painting department at the Maine College of Art in Portland.

*Source: Roswell Artist-in-Residence Foundation, Roswell Museum and Art Center Foundation, Roswell, New Mexico*



**Thinking About Sam**, 1995  
Oil on linen, 9 x 11 in.  
(22.9 x 27.9 cm)  
Courtesy of Bill Hodges Gallery,  
New York, New York



J O A N N J O N E S

**Fortitude Amid Perplexity**, 2004

Oil on linen, 11 x 9 in. (27.9 x 22.9 cm). Courtesy of Bill Hodges Gallery, New York, New York

# LOIS MAILOU JONES

1905 - 1998

Originally from Boston, Massachusetts, Lois Mailou Jones began her artistic studies at the age of fourteen. In 1923 Jones studied at the Boston Museum School, followed by studies in Washington and New York City, while earning a living in illustration and fabric design. Named professor at Howard University, Washington, D.C. in 1930, she taught until her retirement forty-seven years later.

In 1937 Jones won a prize to attend the Académie Julian in Paris. There she was stimulated by the intense artistic activity in the city and encouraged by less prejudice against African Americans than in the United States. Jones began to paint landscapes in the fauvist manner, and cubist style works influenced by African sculpture. On her return to the United States, she looked to African American history for her subject matter. Married in 1953 to Haitian painter Louis Verniard Pierre-Noel, her works reflected multiple voyages around the world, especially her voyages to Africa sponsored by the United States Information Service. She assembled slides and information on African art to found what became the International Archives of Black Artists at Howard University.





**Cape Cod Landscape**, undated  
Oil on canvas, 20 x 28 ¼ in. (50.8 x 71.8 cm)  
Courtesy of Bill Hodges Gallery, New York, New York

# J A C O B L A W R E N C E

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The art of Jacob Lawrence expresses his lifelong concern for human dignity, freedom, and his own social consciousness. His images portray the everyday reality, the struggles and successes of African American life. Using art as an instrument of protest, Lawrence aligned himself with the American school of social realism and Mexican muralist tradition. Born in Atlantic City, New Jersey, Lawrence grew up in Harlem during the Depression. Harlem was an active cultural center then, and Lawrence became interested in the arts while still a teenager. He received early training at art workshops sponsored by the federal government's Works Progress Administration (WPA) in Harlem and then studied at the American Artists School in New York City. From 1938 to 1939, Lawrence worked in the Federal Art Project and produced some of his earliest major works. His first important solo exhibition in 1944, at New York's Museum of Modern Art, secured Lawrence's place as an important commentator on the American scene, particularly the African American experience.

Lawrence's subject matter and painting style remained relatively consistent throughout his career. His subjects ranged from street scenes, to the lives of important African Americans, to powerful narrative series – chronicles of the afflictions endured by African Americans. He portrayed these diverse subjects in a quasi-representational style that combines vivid, often discordant tempera colors with a flattened, fragmented treatment of form and space. The artist's intent was to convey his feelings about the subjects portrayed. As Lawrence said, "My pictures express my life and experience. I paint the things I know about and the things I have experienced."

Throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, Lawrence continued to paint subjects that referred to racial and social issues impacting African Americans. He devoted himself to commissions, especially for murals and limited edition prints, to benefit non-profit organizations.



**Harlem Street Scene, 1975**

Silkscreen, 34 x 27 ½ in. (86.4 x 69.9 cm). Courtesy of ART in Embassies, Washington, D.C.  
Gift of the Foundation for Art and Preservation in Embassies



J A C O B L A W R E N C E

**Supermarket Flora**, 1997. Silkscreen on paper, 38 x 30 in. (96.5 x 76.2 cm)  
Courtesy of the Foundation for Art and Preservation in Embassies, Washington, D.C.

# NORMAN LEWIS

1909 - 1979

Norman Lewis, born in 1909 in New York City, was the first major African American abstract expressionist. Lewis, like fellow artist Jacob Lawrence, attended the art workshops in Harlem. At the art centers, Lewis studied African art and was introduced to Howard University professor Alain Locke's ideas about art, which Locke believed should derive from African themes and aesthetics. However, Lewis saw limitations in the New Negro ideas and questioned its effectiveness in expressing his own identity and interests of the African American community. Lewis later moved from abstract figuration to modernism, as exemplified by artists Wassily Kandinsky and Pablo Picasso. His paintings from this time are devoid of realistic imagery and focused more on conceptual expression, often referring to African American settings and culture. Lewis, always active in the art community, in the 1960s was a founding member of the Spiral Group, a group of African American artists who sought to contribute through their art to the Civil Rights movement.

[www.pbs.org/wnet/aaworld/arts/nlewis.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/aaworld/arts/nlewis.html)



N O R M A N L E W I S

**Serpentine**, 1970

Oil on canvas, 60 x 48 in. (152.4 x 121.9 cm). Courtesy of Bill Hodges Gallery, New York, New York

## L O R N A   S I M P S O N

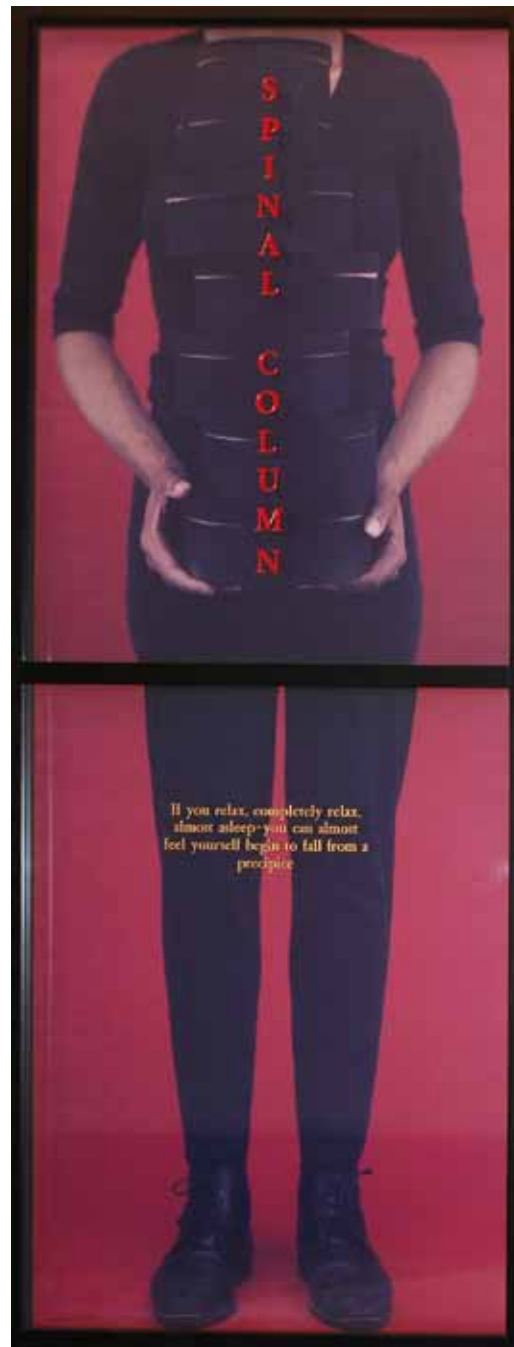
1 9 6 0

Lorna Simpson was born in 1960 in Brooklyn, New York, and received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in photography from the School of Visual Arts, New York, and her Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of California, San Diego. When Simpson emerged from the graduate program at San Diego in 1985, she was already considered a pioneer of conceptual photography.

Lorna Simpson first became well-known in the mid-1980s for her large-scale photograph and text works that confront and challenge narrow, conventional views of gender, identity, culture, history, and memory. With the African-American woman as a visual point of departure, Simpson uses the figure to examine the ways in which gender and culture shape the interactions, relationships, and experiences of our lives in contemporary multi-racial America.

Her work has been exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; the Miami Art Museum, Florida; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota; and the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin. Simpson's first mid-career survey was exhibited at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, California; the Miami Art Museum, Florida; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City; the Kalamazoo Institute of Art, Michigan; and the Gibbes Museum in Charleston, South Carolina.

**Nervous Conditions**, 1992. Two color Polaroid prints with engraved Plexiglas, 48 x 20 in. (121.9 x 50.8 cm).  
Courtesy of Bill Hodges Gallery, New York, New York



# RUBEN UBIERA

1975

Ruben Ubiera was born in 1975 in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, and is a Dominican American neo-figurative artist. When he was fifteen, his family moved to the Bronx, New York, where he was heavily influenced by the graffiti art that surrounded him. Ubiera paints and draws in a style considered by many as pop surrealism, but he prefers to call it urban pop, since he has lived most of his life in urban, populated areas and most of his inspiration is derived from the interactivity between man and his urban environment. His paintings are, on first examination, noted for being charged with “skateboardisms,” paint drips, and the constant presence of graffiti in some shape or form. Ubiera paints on wood and old, found objects. He mixes graphic design on printed pieces with brightly colored paint, applying them to the surface on which he is working. The final product looks decayed.



**Good Times, Buenos Tiempos**, undated. Acrylic and wood stain on reclaimed, old, broken guitar, 17 x 42 x 6 in. (43.2 x 106.7 x 15.2 cm). Courtesy of the artist, Weston, Florida



# KEHINDE WILEY

1977

Los Angeles native and New York based visual artist Kehinde Wiley has firmly situated himself within art history's portrait painting tradition. Wiley engages the signs and visual rhetoric of the heroic, powerful, majestic, and the sublime in his representation of urban, black, and brown men found throughout the world. By applying the visual vocabulary and conventions of glorification, history, wealth, and prestige to the subject matter drawn from the urban fabric, the subjects and stylistic references for his paintings are juxtaposed inversions of each other, forcing ambiguity and provocative perplexity to pervade his imagery.

Initially, Wiley's portraits were based on photographs taken of young men found on the streets of Harlem. As his practice grew, his eye led him toward an international view, including models found in urban landscapes throughout the world – in such places as Mumbai, Senegal, Dakar, and Rio de Janeiro, among others – accumulating a vast body of work called "The World Stage." The models, dressed in their everyday clothing, most of which is based on the notion of far-reaching Western ideals of style, are asked to assume poses found in paintings or sculptures representative of the history of their surroundings.<sup>1</sup>

*The World Stage: China* series evolved out of an invitation to take a studio in Beijing. While working there, the artist took great inspiration from his environment, evident in his color choice, his elaborate patterning, and conceptually through his reference to historic propaganda posters from China's Cultural Revolution. Wiley found an interesting connection between the way the Chinese national identity was manipulated under Mao, with the way that African American identity is portrayed today. For Wiley, the illustrations in the posters parallel worldwide generalizations of individuality wherein singular identities are lost or obliterated through prescribed group characterizations of different societies ... Wiley's paintings, like the posters, encapsulate prevalent societal views of the moment, but also provide an alternate, more valid actuality.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.kehindewiley.com/Artist\\_Statement.html](http://www.kehindewiley.com/Artist_Statement.html)

<sup>2</sup> J. Jankauskas, *Kehinde Wiley, The World Stage: China, Sheboygan, 2007*, p. 7



KEHINDE WILEY

**Dwayne**, 2008. Oil on canvas, 26 x 22 in. (66 x 55.9 cm)  
Courtesy of the artist and Julie and Bennett Roberts, Culver City, California

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