

Art Collection of the
United States Embassy
Mbabane Eswatini

Art Collection of the United States Embassy Mbabane Eswatini

**Art Collection of
the United States Embassy
Mbabane Eswatini**



Introduction	9
Aleta Armstrong	18
Peter Armstrong	20
Tiffany Bozic	24
Bhekani Dlamini	28
Carol Eckert	30
Josh Faught	34
Mari Gardner	36
Gone Rural	40
Livi laBomake	42 - 45
Zanele Buthelezi	
Catherine Dlamini	
Nonzwakazi Dlamini	
Phindile Mamba	
Scott Matthews	46
Ray Mhishi & Gertrud Jager	48
Nandipha Mntambo	50
Khulekani Msweli	58
David Philpot	60
Valerie Piraino	62
Carrie Schneider	67
Ann Weber	72
Index	74
Credits	77

Introduction

Art in Embassies determines the art displayed in United States Embassies like the one constructed in Mbabane, Eswatini. The decisions are based on many criteria – aesthetics, identity, and intent, amongst others – while always acknowledging the space as a site where Americans represent their government in another country and what that means in and of itself. Foremost, Art in Embassies recognizes that contemporary art provides one of the best opportunities for American, international, and local audiences to experience a myriad of values-both mutual and different.

For Mbabane, Art in Embassies curators identified contemporary art emblematic of the moment in which American and Eswatini artists are currently working. The art collection brings together thirty-four works by twenty-six American, Eswatini, and African artists. On display in both interior and exterior public spaces, the art encompasses various materials and media while exhibiting many craft techniques like basket making, woodcarving, weaving, papier-mâché, and beadwork, which have long been object-making practices that empower individuals and foster communities. Each artwork exemplifies notions of storytelling – the results of multiple perspectives of artists as

they make their individual and collective work on direct and indirect terms while considering identity, politics, society, environment, and culture.

It is noteworthy that several of the artists had the opportunity to create their respective artworks with the advance knowledge that they were intended for display in the U.S. Embassy. Tasked to make a new artwork for a representational space in the Embassy, artists pulled inspiration from a variety of sources – personal and collective experience, nature, folklore, and art and craft traditions – while considering cultural diplomacy in the twenty-first century. As construction began on the new Embassy, Art in Embassies asked four U.S. artists – Mari Gardner, Josh Faught, Tiffany Bozic, and Valerie Piraino – to create work informed by their own artistic practice, identity, and site-specificity. Each artist mined his or her understanding of the country; both Gardner and Piraino visited Eswatini whereas, from their studios in the U.S., Faught and Bozic saw commonalities in the versatile, protean ways that can be achieved through art making.

Indeed, Mari Gardner's (b. 1976, Portland, Oregon) experiences, as an example, illuminate the connecting networks that art can build and strengthen across cultural differences. Art in Embassies commissioned Gardner to design and create *Entwined Articulation* (2016) – a

large, site-specific exterior wall mosaic made of glass. Gardner achieved her artwork with direct community engagement; to fabricate and install the mosaic in Eswatini, Gardner worked with many local artists at Yebo! ArtReach and Ngwenya Glass. The mosaic's success is the result of the intersecting artistic practices evident in this project.

Gardner initially became involved with Art in Embassies in 2007, when her artwork *Bullet Proof, Blanket of a City* (2003) was exhibited at the U.S. Embassy residence in Mbabane. Her inclusion led to an artist exchange in 2009 in which Gardner first travelled to Eswatini, where she visited local orphanages and not-for-profit organizations. Gardner held workshops with children, many of whom were orphaned because of the direct impact of HIV and AIDS on their families.

Gardner also facilitated photography and audio workshops with an HIV-positive support group in Timbutini, a rural village twelve miles east of the city of Manzini. Participants shared feelings and personal stories about the injustices they had experienced being HIV positive, documenting the event themselves, many using camera equipment for the first time. These interactions informed an exhibition created by Gardner at the U.S. Embassy of portraits, images, and audio of and by the Eswatini women and men she met in the workshops in Timbutini. In 2015, as



Mari Gardner
Unheard Voices: A Song in Siswati film project.

a Fulbright U.S. Scholar, Gardner returned to Eswatini, where she again worked with a group of women affected by gender-based violence on a film and photography project *Tibi Tendlu*. According to Gardner, “rooted in participation and dialogue, art was used as a vehicle to witness and challenge the female position in society, while celebrating the strength, dignity, and grace of Eswatini women.”

Livi laBomake (or “Women’s Voices”) is a local program led by Yebo! ArtReach with support from the U.S. Ambassador’s Community Grant on Gender, through United States President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) that brought twenty Eswatini women together to share their personal stories and make art. In turn, four paintings from artists of Livi laBomake: Zanele Buthelezi (b. 1971, Matsetsa, Eswatini), Catherine Dlamini (b. 1954, Dlangeni, Eswatini), Nonzwakazi Dlamini (b. 1971, Kwaluseni, Eswatini), and Phindile Mamba (b. 1977, Mbabane, Eswatini)– are also included in the Embassy’s collection.



Artists of Livi laBomake.

The promotion of such projects raises the importance and self-worth of women who, through art, poetry, and varied forms of creativity, express and connect to each other, potentially forming communities in patriarchal cultures and societies. These transformative effects highlight the impact that art has on life and vice-versa; in the case of Carrie Schneider’s (b. 1979, Chicago,

Illinois) four photographs from her *Reading Women* series, she describes how the portraits of her artist friends reading books show “the desire to connect with another creative voice in a way that resonates with her own art and life.”¹

San Francisco-based artist Josh Faught (b. 1979, Saint Louis, Missouri) created *Siyinqaba* (2015), a site-specific, hand-woven, fabric-and-yarn installation named after Eswatini’s national motto, which means, at once, “We are a fortress,” “We are a mystery/riddle,” and “We hide ourselves away.” In 2010, the *New York Times* critic Roberta Smith described Faught’s work as “magpie art” and as “self-aware, craft-conscious combinations of painting, relief, collage, assemblage, knitting, weaving, fiber art.”² His art, which has investigated the histories of pop culture, feminism, and AIDS, is also informed both by Faught’s immediate personal experience and narratives of larger groups who may be less forthcoming because of their own respective concerns of identity and circumstance, not unlike many communities found in Eswatini. Faught consciously builds these constellations of stories into his work by utilizing craft techniques to allow for personal expression and anticipate the collective experience many will seek in the object.

Indeed, Faught’s process is similar to contemporary Eswatini craftspeople, like Siphwe Mngometulu



Josh Faught
Siyinqaba
2015

1. <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/books-as-muses#>

2. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9505E2DE1F31F931A25751C0A9669D8B63>

(b. 1970, Lavumisa, Eswatini) and her mother 'Gogo' Christina Mngometulu, who use longstanding weaving practices to make 'biography baskets,' which are informed by the weavers' respective experiences, including the generational loss of population due to illness, HIV and AIDS. The Mngometulus' woven sculptures are rooted in their family and life's routines, drawing attention to the maker's own day-to-day narrative and how it directly impacts the size, materials, and form of the basket.

Ann Weber (b. 1950, Jackson, Michigan) creates abstract sculptures, woven from cardboard using methods akin to traditional basket making. Weber's *Fecund* (2014) is two forms side by side—interconnected and almost complement in shape, but each is unique, different and independent of the other as well. Weber says that her sculptures "read as metaphors for life experiences, such as the balancing acts that define our lives. 'How far can I build this before it collapses?' is a question on my mind as I work."³

Aleta Armstrong (b. 1961, Helsinki, Finland) moved to Eswatini in 1984, and her ink-on-handwoven cotton work *Trance* (2013) uses intricate imagery of African animals and figures in a pattern recalling those of Finnish textile designers at Tampella and Marimekko. New York-based artist Valerie Piraino (b. 1981

Kigali, Rwanda) recognizes her transnational identity as unique to synthesizing perspectives in her sculpture and drawings. Much of her work addresses and explores the fruit form as a proxy for landscape and the body. In March 2015, Piraino participated in a week-long artist exchange in Eswatini, where she visited the region and researched concepts for her sculpture *Black Sunrise* (2015). Initially drawn to the Marula tree and its small fruit, unique to Madagascar and Africa, Piraino instead focused on a common and simple crop – corn – important to Eswatini's economy (and that of the United States) as part of the complex systems of global food production.

Eswatini, also well-known for its diverse landscapes and rich wilderness reserves, is home to animals like rhinoceros, elephants, and giraffes; its ecological diversity is the source of inspiration for many of the collection's artists. Peter Armstrong (b. 1949, Mbabane, Eswatini) identified the indigenous bird Hadeda Ibis to depict in his installation of sculptures, seven of which are in flight, facing the direction of the granite peak of Nyonyane Mountain. The peak, known as Execution Rock, is an imposing natural landmark to the surrounding area. Its monolithic presence is echoed in the background forms of Mari Gardner's mosaic and is considered in Scott Matthew's tongue-in-cheek photographic series *Close Encounters with Execution Rock* in which ordinary objects surprisingly resemble the peak's form. The small country's celebrated flora and

3. <http://www.annwebersculpture.com/html/statement.html>

fauna were also of particular interest for San Francisco-based artist Tiffany Bozic (b. 1979, Russellville, Arkansas) who paints depictions of mammals, birds, plants, and insects, on maple panel, which are both taxonomically accurate and whimsically imagined. Bozic's *Coming Together* (2015) is one her largest paintings to date and depicts the national bird of Eswatini, the Purple-crested Turaco.

In the sculpture *Magic Woman with Birds* (2015), Eswatini artist Bhekani Dlamini (b. 1976, Matsapha, Eswatini) also references the Purple-crested Turaco. The papier-mâché figure holds the Turaco in the palm of one hand while an eagle is perched on the other.

Eswatini is a country with a history of tradition; in fact, it is one of the world's few remaining monarchies. Identifying the Kingdom of Eswatini as rooted in its heritage of ritual and practice, many artists referenced African traditions of making in their own contemporary work. Khulekani Msweli (b. 1984, Vuvulane, Eswatini) sourced wood from Jacaranda trees, often used in Eswatini woodcarving, to create *To Everything There is a Season* (2015) – a sculpture mandala-like in its form. Msweli assembled the traverse cut circles and uniform logs to form a radiating circle that references both woodcarving traditions and materials. The collection includes a series of lithographs, *Hinterlands of Devotion I – VII* (2014),

by South African artist Nandipha Mntambo (b. 1982, Mbabane, Eswatini), who also sources local materials like animal skins, cowhides, and cow hair into her artistic investigations of the human form, topography, and movement. Incorporating the staff into his artwork as a symbol of African ancestral legacy and as a totem or talisman in all cultures, Detroit-based artist David Philpot (b. 1940, Chicago, Illinois) crafts elaborate and ornate wood canes and walking sticks. He carves them with complicated patterns and figurative elements and ornaments them with beads, found objects, and Swarovski crystals.

The influences of beadmaking traditions of decoration and ornamentation in Africa, especially the coiling found in traditional Yoruba crown headdresses adorned with flying birds, are also reworked in Carol Eckert's (b. 1945, Chapel Hill, North Carolina) artwork of animal mythologies and symbols.⁴

— Braden Malnic
February 2018

4. <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-carol-eckert-13619>

Aleta Armstrong

born 1961

Helsinki Finland

Trance

2013

Hand woven cotton, ink, wooden frame.

68 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 51 $\frac{3}{16}$ inches

175 x 130 centimeters



Peter Armstrong

born 1940

Mbabane Eswatini

Hadedas

2015

Fiberglass, metal, resin, bronze.

Each of the 7 flying birds:
23 ⁵/₈ inches x 98 ⁷/₁₆ inches
60 x 250 centimeters

Each of the 2 sitting birds:
Height: 31 ¹/₂ inches (80 centimeters)

The Hadedda Ibis is an integral part of the local (Mantenga, Ezulwini) wildlife population and can be seen and heard on a daily basis. Each evening they return home to roost further up the Lusushwana River.





Tiffany Bozic

born 1979

Russellville Arkansas

Coming Together

2015

Acrylic on maple panel.

72 x 36 inches

182.9 x 91.4 centimeters



Courtesy of the artist and Joshua Liner Gallery



Preliminary study of *Coming Together*

Bozic celebrates the beautiful flora and fauna of Eswatini, including the national bird, the Purple-crested Turaco, amidst a swirling bouquet of native flowers. Crawling up the tangled vines of the floral assemblage, a striped polecat (*Ictonyx striatus*) meets the gaze and touches noses with one of the Turaco birds, inviting peaceful negotiation. Amongst the floral structure, there are king protea and pincushion flower as well as lesser known species of native flowers, such as *Gladiolus alatus*, *Ceropegia*, *Stapelia*, and life-saver plant *Huernia zebrine*, representing Eswatini's diverse geographical regions.

Bhekani Dlamini

born 1976

Matsapha Eswatini

Magic Woman with Birds

2015

Wire, papier mâché.

78 ³/₄ x 59 ¹/₁₆ x 24 inches
200 x 150 x 61 centimeters

The magic woman has a bird in each hand. One hand holds the eagle, the national bird of the U.S and the other hand holds the Ligwalagwala / Purple-crested Lourie (or Turaco), the national bird of Eswatini.



Carol Eckert

born 1945

Chapel Hill North Carolina

Time of the Ten Suns

2013

Wire, linen.

46 x 99 x 3 inches

116.8 x 251.5 x 7.6 centimeters

Time of the Ten Suns is taken from an ancient Chinese legend of a time when there were ten suns that took turns rising in the sky. One day, they decided to rise at once. Lakes dried and crops perished. The god of archery was asked to save the land, and so he shot down nine of the suns, leaving only the one we have today, keeping heaven and earth in balance.





Josh Faught

born 1979

Saint Louis Missouri

Siyinqaba

2015

Handwoven and hand-dyed hemp, cotton,
lamé yarns stitched to stretched linen ground.

120 x 99 x 2 inches

304.8 x 251.5 x 5.1 centimeters

Faught was inspired by Eswatini's national motto,
Siyinqaba, meaning, "We are the fortress."



Mari Gardner

American

Entwined Articulation
(*Kulumbana kwemasiko Ngekukhlulumisana*)

2016

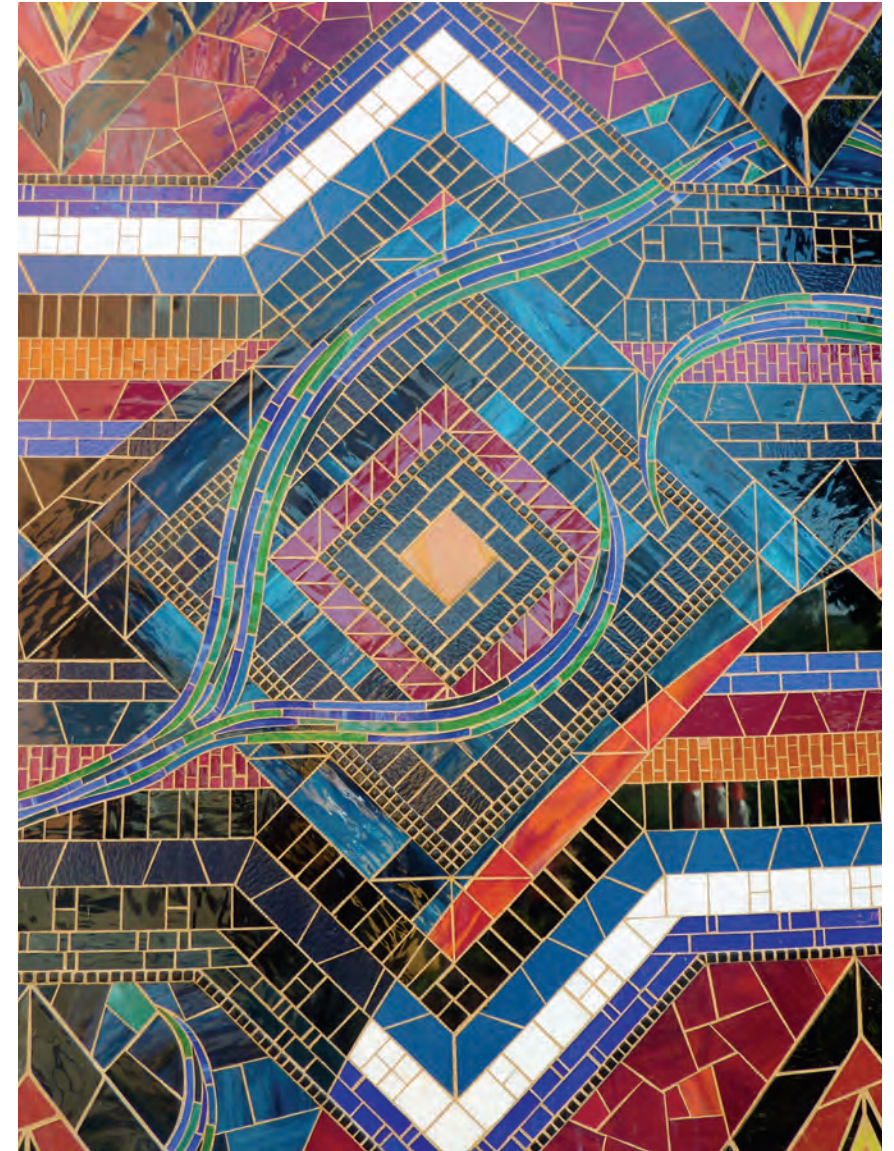
Stained glass and hand blown recycled glass.

9 x 39 feet
2.74 x 11.89 meters

Created in collaboration with artists from:

Yebo! ArtReach: Thabo Lukhele, Fela Dlamini, Dane Armstrong, Ngwenya
Glass: Nathi Shongwe, Siphon Dlamini, James Magagula, Jabulane Dlamini, Carter Ntjagase, P C van Tonder.

Installed on an exterior wall of the Embassy is a monumental mosaic made of thousands of colorful stained and vitreous glass tiles. The mosaic is a result of collaboration between a U.S. artist and a team of Eswatini artists.





Gone Rural

Lutindzi Mountain

2016

Lutindzi grass, sisal, and recycled fabric mounted on metal frame.

142 x 34 inches

360.7 x 86.4 centimeters

The series of woven disks was inspired by the Ezulwini valley, where the U.S. Embassy is located, and the surrounding granite mountains.

Artisans: Mercia Theron (b. 1989, Pretoria, South Africa), Bakhetsile Sihlongonyane (b. 1962, Endzingeni, Eswatini), Bonakele Ngwenya (b. 1992, Ezindwendweni, Eswatini), Siphwe Mngometulu (b. 1970, Ezindwendweni, Eswatini), Sthembile Myeni (b. 1975, Ezindwendweni, Eswatini).



Livi laBomake

From the Livi laBomake (Women's Voices) Art Project with Yebo!
ArtReach Support from the U.S. Ambassador's Community Grant
on Gender, through PEPFAR.

Aspects of Love

2015

Acrylic on box canvas.

Zanele Buthelezi

born 1971

Matsetsa Eswatini



Catherine Dlamini

born 1954

Dlangeni Eswatini



Nonzwakazi Dlamini

born 1971

Kwaluseni Eswatini



Phindile Mamba

born 1977

Mbabane Eswatini



Scott Matthews

American

Close Encounters with Execution Rock

undated

Photograph.

11 ¹³/₁₆ x 16 ¹/₈ inches

30 x 41 centimeters



Ray Mhishi & Gertrud Jager

Uncle Sam is in the Valley

2014

Safety helmets, plastic spoons, work overalls.

Courtesy of Pachimana Weaving
Ezulwini, Eswatini

80 ¹/₁₆ x 92 ¹/₂ inches
205 x 235 centimeters

Uncle Sam is in the Valley was created
exclusively out of waste materials generated
at the U.S. Embassy building site.



Nandipha Mntambo

born 1982

Mbabane Eswatini

Hinterlands of Devotion I - VII

2014

Lithographs.

“We all have a body but each is perceived differently, although bodies are essentially the same thing. The whole point for me is that we are all the same. It is more about finding a core, a core of sameness. Regardless of distances, time and geography we all have things that make us so similar.”



Hinterlands of Devotion IV, 2014.



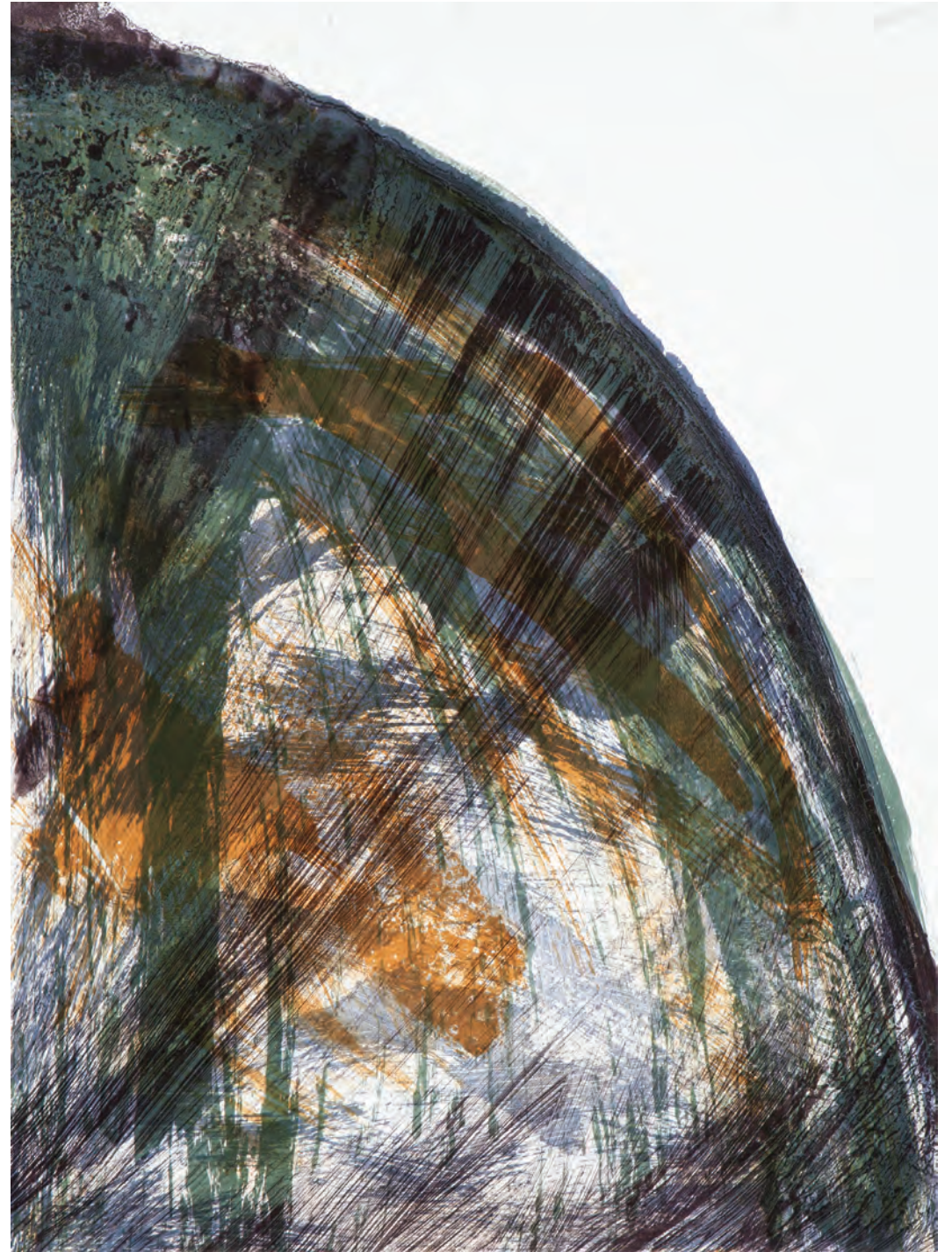
Hinterlands of Devotion I, 2014.



Hinterlands of Devotion II, 2014.



Hinterlands of Devotion VII, 2014.



Hinterlands of Devotion VI, 2014.



Hinterlands of Devotion V, 2014.

Khulekani Msweli

born 1984

Vuvulane Eswatini

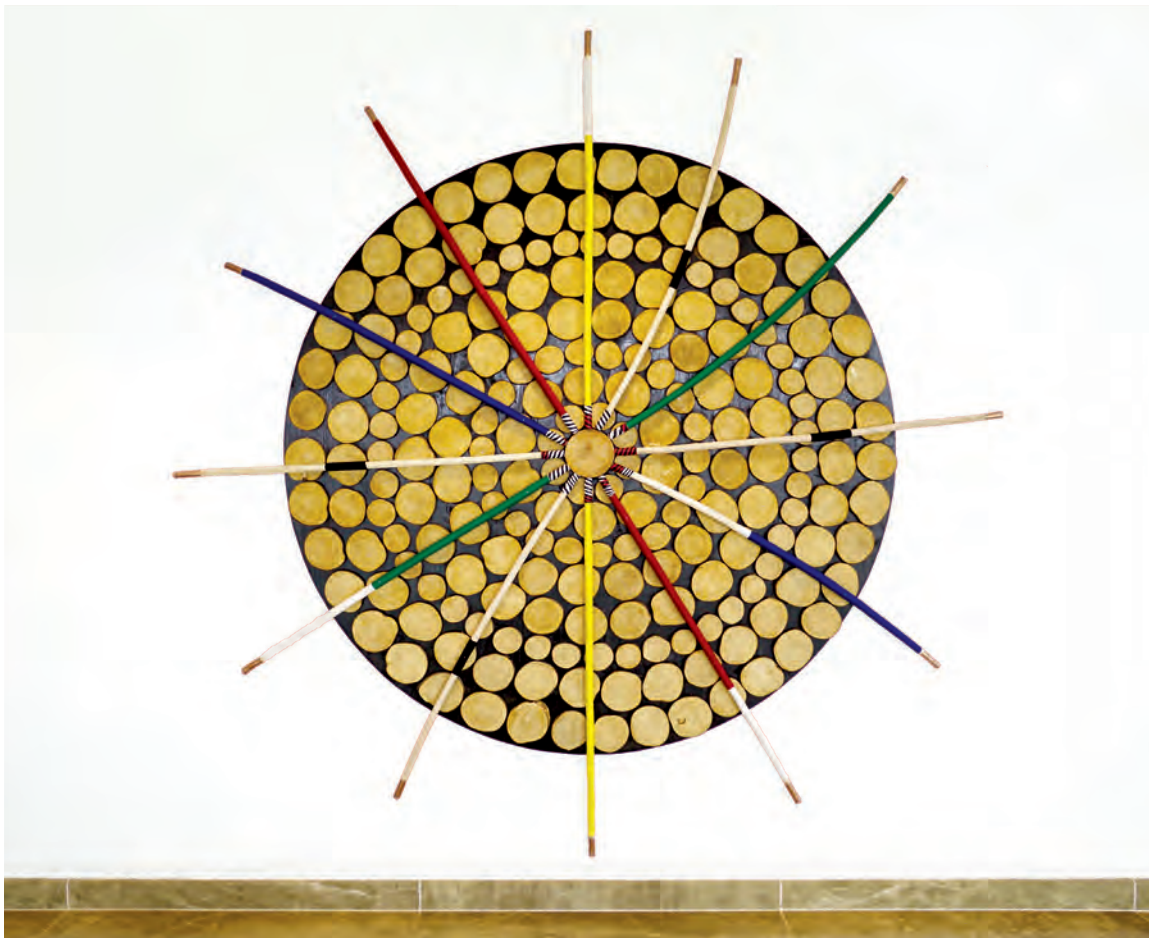
To Everything There is a Season

2015

Jacaranda wood, ply wood, masonite,
polyester fiber, oil paint.

98 ⁷/₁₆ inch diameter x 5 ⁷/₈ inch depth
39.7 pounds

250 centimeter diameter x 15 centimeter depth
18 kilograms



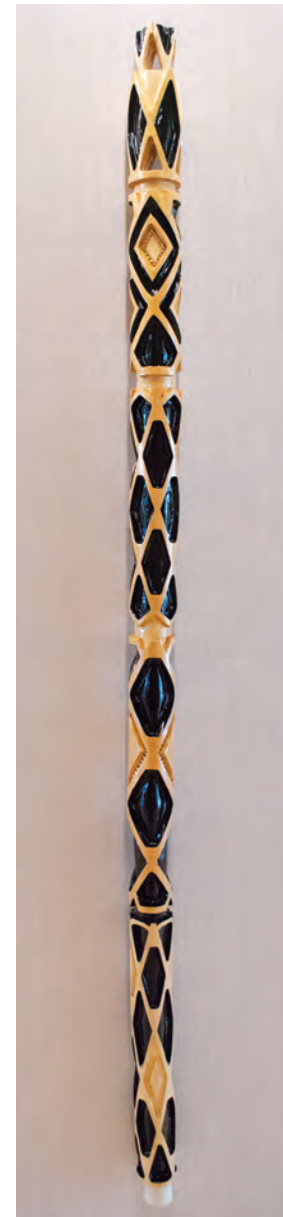
“The black background symbolizes the night sky/universe. The layer of cylindrical pieces of jacaranda wood are our moons and stars which keep us dreaming and hoping for a better season. The last layer of rods which are wound up in wool thread, beads and wire depicting the various changes of cultural and human seasons. The overall cycle is that of humanity’s continuous hope for a better season.”

David Philpot

born 1940

Chicago Illinois

A self-taught artist working in folk art traditions, Philpot began carving and making staffs in 1971. He cures the wood, draws the patterns, carves, sands, and then embellishes with beads, paint, shells, faux jewels, and found objects.



Black Diamond

undated

Wood, mixed media.

Height:
78 inches
198.12 centimeters



Giraffe

undated

Wood, mixed media.

Height:
80 inches
203.2 centimeters



Crystalis

undated

Wood, mixed media.

Height:
78 inches
198.12 centimeters

Valerie Piraino

born 1981

Kigali Rwanda

Black Sunrise

2015

Polystyrene, epoxy clay, resin, paint, rope.

Each:

36 x 24 x 24 inches

91.4 x 61 x 61 centimeters

Maize is a fundamental, staple crop, grown in Eswatini and elsewhere that in its ubiquity connects us on a universal level – geographies, cultures, and histories.





Carrie Schneider

born 1979

Chicago Illinois

“Watching another person read is an incredibly intimate experience...There’s something powerful and rare in the intensity of concentration experienced while reading. It’s this moment I’m after: when the sitter loses awareness of the camera and seems to be transported elsewhere.

...What initially compelled me to begin the project is mirrored in the portraits themselves: a young artist’s desire to connect with another creative voice in a way that resonates with her own art and life.”

- Carrie Schneider on the *Reading Women* series

Abigail reading Angela Davis (An Autobiography, 1974)
Reading Women series

2012 - 2014

C print, Edition 3 of 3.

36 x 30 inches, 91.4 x 76.2 centimeters



Evan reading Anne Lamott (Traveling Mercies, 2000)
Reading Women series

2012 - 2014

C print, Edition 3 of 3.

36 x 30 inches, 91.4 x 76.2 centimeters



Kelly reading Gabrielle Hamilton (Blood, Bones & Butter: The Inadvertent Education of a Reluctant Chef, 2011)

Reading Women series

2012 - 2014

C print, Edition 1 of 3.

36 x 30 inches, 91.4 x 76.2 centimeters



Naomi reading Adrian Piper (Out of Order, Out of Sight, Vol. I: Selected Writings in Meta Art 1968 - 1992, pub. 1999)

Reading Women series

2012 - 2014

C print, Edition 2 of 3.

36 x 30 inches, 91.4 x 76.2 centimeters



Ann Weber

born 1950

Jackson Michigan

Fecund

2014

Found cardboard, staples, polyurethane.

Left:

77 x 26 x 24 inches, 25 pounds

195.6 x 66 x 61 centimeters, 11.3 kilograms

Right:

86 x 28 x 22 inches, 25 pounds

218.4 x 71.1 x 55.9 centimeters, 11.3 kilograms

Weber uses simple geometric forms as stand-ins for the human figure to make statements about the dynamics of relationships, interconnection and finding balance.



Index of Artists



Aleta Armstrong



Peter Armstrong



Tiffany Bozic



Catherine Dlamini



Bhekani Dlamini



Zanele Buthelezi



Phindile Mamba



Carol Eckert



Josh Faught



Mari Gardner



Nonzwakazi Dlamini



Scott Matthews



Ray Mhishi & Gertrud Jager



Siphiwe Mngometulu



Georgio Sabino

Nandipha Mntambo



Khulekani Msweli



David Philpot



Valerie Piraino



Carrie Schneider



Ann Weber

Credits

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."

**Art in Embassies,
U.S. Department of State**

Camille Benton, *Curator*

Rebecca Clark, *Registrar*

Braden Malnic, *Curatorial Assistant*

Tabitha Brackens, *Publications Manager*

Sally Mansfield, *Editor*

Tori See, *Assistant Editor*

**U.S. Embassy,
Mbabane, Eswatini**

Mbabane, Eswatini

James Lehman, Project Director

Public Diplomacy Section

General Service Operations

Facilities Management Office

Special thanks to Aleta Armstrong with
Yebo! Art and Design for your assistance,
Lori Krause and Zac Willis for installation,
Sari Jaakola for photography, and
Vicente Gutiérrez for publication design.

Printed by Global Publishing Solutions (GPS)

