



United States Embassy Kampala
Art in Embassies Exhibition

Adrienne Brown-David
Passing, 2021

Oil and acrylic on canvas
30 x 24 in. (76,2 x 61 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Water Valley, Mississippi

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 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."

<https://art.state.gov/>

Introduction

I enjoy the interplay of art with its environment — both the immediate area where an item may be placed as well as its broader surroundings. I enjoy how pieces of art interact with each other, at times amplifying a theme or even changing our perception of a piece. For this exhibition, I enjoy how common themes emerged among the seven artworks to form a connection, although each piece was selected individually based on what appealed to my eye and brought a smile to my face.

These themes — women, youth, and transformation — are apparent in the art and artists themselves. Six of the seven artists are women of various ages, backgrounds, and experiences, and much of the artwork celebrates women and girls at different stages of life. Several of the pieces showcase young people, highlighting their potential and optimism and reminding observers of our shared obligation to create conditions in which they can thrive. Bridging both themes is *The Look* by Lavett Ballard, which is evocative of the family matriarch (I am also reminded of my grandmother) protecting and providing guidance to the younger generations depicted in other pieces in the exhibition.

The concept of transformation manifests in numerous ways. Many works are made from recycled or reclaimed wood, reflecting the artists' ability to see something new in something old. This also applies to *United We Live* by Ilaamen Pelshaw, in which she reimagined a photograph of men from the 1940s into a celebration of the diversity of modern American women. *Affirmations* by Katharen Wiese transforms everyday beauty objects familiar to Black women around the world into a work of beauty. Similarly, *Ashes of Love* by Patrick Mulondo converts scrap into sculpture. The latter two pieces reinforce that art and beauty are always around us if we choose to see them.

These themes link these pieces and the works by Adrienne Brown-David, Kristin Pluhacek, and Ruth Owens into a single exhibition. I also believe they resonate here in Uganda, whose population is one of the world's youngest and where the United States' engagement with the Ugandan people supports economic and democratic transformations to help the country flourish.

I am deeply grateful to all the artists who generously entrusted me with their work. I am honored to share their creations with guests from Uganda and the international community. I extend a special thanks to Art in Embassies Curator Welmoed Laanstra, who introduced me to new artists and consolidated the exhibition despite the complications of pandemic restrictions. I am also appreciative of my colleagues at U.S. Mission Uganda, with special acknowledgment to Assistant General Services Officer Sean Miller for his efforts in installing the collection, carpenters Herman Kajjabwangu and Mark Nsubuga for their careful handling and hanging of the pieces, and the wider facility management team who demonstrated their artistry in crafting the pedestal for *Ashes of Love*.

I hope you enjoy the artwork and I look forward to hearing about other themes you identify.

Ambassador Natalie E. Brown

*Kampala, Uganda
February 2022*

Lavett Ballard (born 1970)

Lavett Ballard is a mixed-media artist who reimagines the visual narrative of African American history, specifically social issues affecting Black women, through collaged photos adorned with paint, oil pastels, and metallic foils. Ballard deconstructs and layers personal family photographs and imagery sourced from historical archives on sliced wood and reclaimed wood fences. The fusion of wood and photography harkens back to the artist's southern roots, specifically the family log cabin in Virginia where she spent the summer months.¹ Surrounded by generations of family photographs, Ballard developed a strong affinity for visual storytelling that sustains her creative practice.

Ballard earned a dual bachelor's degree in studio art and art history with a minor in museum studies from Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, and earned a Master of Fine Arts degree in studio arts from the University of the Arts, Philadelphia. She is an adjunct professor at Rowan College of South Jersey, Vineland, New Jersey. In 2020, Ballard's portrait of Rosa Parks was featured on one of the regional covers of *Time* magazine's 100 Women of the Year. Her work is in the permanent collections of the African American Museum of Philadelphia; the Colored Girls Museum, Philadelphia; the Jules Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art, Auburn, Alabama; and the Petrucci Family Foundation Collection of African American Art, Asbury, New Jersey.

¹ "Artist Statement," Lavett Ballard, accessed June 11, 2021, <https://www.lavettbeart.com/>.



The Look, 2020

Collage and mixed media on wood slice

12 x 16 in. (30,5 x 40,6 cm)

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Myrtis, Baltimore, Maryland

Adrienne Brown-David (born 1978)

"My work captures black childhood that is pure and uninterrupted...It is essential that the work illuminates an often underrecognized narrative: that black childhood is as important and as beautiful as every other child's. Society tends to cut short the childhood of black and brown children. What does this mean for my children?

As my children get older, and their childhood becomes less about innocence, and more about solidifying the women they will become, the mood of the work shifts...Sometimes that looks like attitudes, eye rolling, and slumped shoulders, but other times that looks like elaborate designs in their hair, headwraps, and big hoop earrings. These shifts in their growth are just as important to the women that they will become as their ability to have free and innocent childhoods. I want my work to reinforce the humanization of black youth and how that relates to growing up in America."¹

Adrienne Brown-David is a Mississippi-based figurative painter. She studied at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago for one year, learning the principles of art and design. For several years, she lived in the U.S. Virgin Islands, where she experimented with different styles and dedicated herself to painting. Her work is represented in private collections across the United States, and she has exhibited at numerous galleries and museums, including the Ohr-O'Keefe Museum Of Art, Biloxi, Mississippi, and the Walter Anderson Museum of Art, Ocean Springs, Mississippi.²

¹ "About," Adrienne Brown-David, Accessed June 28, 2021, <https://www.adriennebrown-david.com/about>.

² "Adrienne Brown David- Biography," Jonathan Ferrara Gallery, accessed June 16, 2021, <https://www.jonathanferraragallery.com/artists/adrienne-brown-david>.



Passing, 2021

Oil and acrylic on canvas

30 x 24 in. (76,2 x 61 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Water Valley, Mississippi

Patrick Mulondo (born 1989)

Ugandan artist Patrick Mulondo crafts expressive figural sculptures from discarded materials, giving a new life and purpose to common objects. This practice holds multiple layers of meaning for him, as he hopes to communicate not only the value of recycled “junk” but also, symbolically, of marginalized young Ugandans who live in poverty.¹ “The machination challenge of creating an unequalled piece of art from flung metal parts with a tremendous recycling aim is the task ... of my career,”² he has said. Orphaned at a young age, Mulondo temporarily lived on the streets and sold scrap metal to buy food, but he was able to attend college through the generosity of benefactors.³ His works are designed to be highly interactive and prompt viewers to question their preconceived notions about aesthetics and beauty.

Mulondo graduated from Makerere University, Kampala, where he majored in sculpture and jewelry making. He has been awarded several commissions by the Ugandan government, and his work is on view in Uganda and Kenya and has also been exhibited in the United States. In 2015, his sculpture was exhibited at the United Nations Headquarters, New York, and subsequently sold; the proceeds were donated to organizations that support children affected by the Ebola crisis.⁴

¹ Patrick Mulondo, email to the author, July 21, 2021.

² Patrick Mulondo, email to the author, July 18, 2021.

³ “Scott Valley welcomes young, gifted artist from Uganda,” *Siskiyou Daily News*, June 4, 2015, <https://www.siskiyoudaily.com/article/20150604/news/150609847>.

⁴ Mark Westall, “United Nations to Host Ebola Art Exhibition,” *FAD Magazine*, July 6, 2015, <https://fadmagazine.com/2015/07/06/united-nations-to-host-ebola-art-exhibition/>.



Ashes of Love, 2021

Scrap metal, fiberglass,
and recycled newspapers
34 x 18 in. (86,36 x 45,72 cm)
Courtesy of the artist,
Kampala, Uganda

Ruth Owens (born 1959)

"[My] work expands the narrative around feminine and racial identity. Putting forth the concept that identity is fluid and open, my subjects cross boundaries that hold in fixed and static constructs. Revealing the complexity, nuances, and psychology of individual people of color, I resist essential or stereotypical limits. I use myself and the intimacy of my family as models to assert the individualities, challenges, and unique perspectives of lives that are atypical by virtue of the standards and narrow vision prevalent in the world."¹

Ruth Owens is a figurative painter and video artist. Born to a White, German mother and a Black, American military serviceman from Georgia, the nomadic lifestyle of her childhood was complicated by restrictions imposed on mixed families. This experience was critical in forming her cultural identity and, by extension, her artistic practice: she frequently culls imagery from her family's super-8 film archive to explore themes of family dynamics and personal memory. *Patricia T.* and *Young Graduate* are based on the artist's kindergarten class portrait at an all-Black school in Augusta, Georgia.²

Owens graduated in 2018 with a Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of New Orleans after leaving her medical practice of twenty-five years. Artist residencies include the Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, Massachusetts; the Studios at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams; and the Joan Mitchell Center, New Orleans.³

¹ Ruth Owens, email to author, June 8, 2021.

² "Ruth Owens: Be Kind To Yourself," Jonathan Ferrara Gallery, uploaded May 4, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQ2lO08iWHA>.

³ "About," Ruth Owens, accessed June 12, 2021, <https://www.ruthowensart.com/about>

Young Graduate, 2020

Acrylic on paper

15 1/2 x 8 in. (39,4 x 20,3 cm)

Courtesy of the artist and Jonathan Ferrara Gallery,
New Orleans, Louisiana



Patricia T., 2019

Casein on paper

11 3/4 x 6 3/4 in. (29,8 x 17,1 cm)

Courtesy of the artist and Jonathan Ferrara Gallery,
New Orleans, Louisiana

Ilaamen Pelshaw (born 1977)

"I create art that is colorful, warm, and happy, just like my heritage. I'm a visual artist, and I mainly work with acrylic paint, graphite, and digital media. By using common elements like animals, food, people, and everyday objects, my pieces overlap themes and touch emotions. Geometric shapes and contrasting colors are reoccurring elements in my pieces. My pieces often refer to popular and mass culture and are a celebration of the beauty of daily things and aesthetic as a whole. My art has graphic aspects due to my background in graphic design and illustration."¹

Artist and illustrator Ilaamen Pelshaw was born in Guatemala and has lived in Omaha, Nebraska, since 2015. With a bachelor's degree in graphic design from Universidad Rafael Landívar, Guatemala, she worked for nearly two decades in the commercial and corporate arts. She has exhibited her work at museums and galleries throughout the west coast and the Pacific northwest. Her work can be found in numerous private collections in the United States and Guatemala.²

¹ Ilaamen Pelshaw, email to author, November 20, 2021.

² "About," Ilaamen Pelshaw, accessed June 14, 2021, <https://www.ilaamen.com/about>.



United We Live, 2020
Acrylic and graphite on wood
37 x 24 in. (94 x 61 cm)
Courtesy of the artist, Omaha, Nebraska

Kristin Pluhacek (born 1967)

"I don't invent; I observe. I look for a strong subject, something that maintains its presence while allowing for elaboration and whimsy. Most of these things are already present in my life, existing in simple, ordinary ways until one day they exude a sort of grandness. They become monumental in nature and I want to experience and share that nature in the act of interpretation.

The directness of drawing seems most effective for this action, especially pastel, with its thick layering potential and pure color (although lately oil, acrylic, and watercolor has provided many of the same possibilities). I like my forms to be bold, with distinct mass, as if they were carved from the negative space. But it's also important that they be light, with the potential for motion. So I often introduce gesture as an overlay above solid shape, defining the form and releasing it from the rest of the composition. Line is always present and purposeful."¹

Kristin Pluhacek is a painter and illustrator who lives and works in Omaha, Nebraska. She received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Creighton University, Omaha, where she is now a drawing instructor. Her drawings and paintings have been exhibited extensively in Midwestern fine arts galleries and museums, and her work is represented in numerous public and private collections.²

¹ Kristin Pluhacek, email to the author, June 21, 2021.

² "Kristin Pluhacek- Biography," Kristin Pluhacek, accessed June 16, 2021, <http://www.kkpluhacek.com/about.htm>.



Fad, 2016

Pastel

50 x 52 in. (127 x 132,1 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Omaha, Nebraska

Katharen Wiese (born 1995)

Katharen Wiese is an artist, curator, and community arts organizer who seeks to build an art historical cannon that decentralizes patriarchy and white supremacy. She references the work of African American artists exclusively within her own art as a form of re-education and inspiration. Wiese's work analyzes the relationship between power and Blackness as they relate to art history, colorism within the female fashion industry, the criminal justice system, and multiracial individuals. Wiese uses found materials and portraiture to make evident the relationship between identity formation and the material world.¹

Wiese received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in studio art from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. Her work is a part of the Nebraska History Museum collection as well as the Thomas P. Coleman Print collection at the Sheldon Museum of Art, both in Lincoln. She was a 2018 nominee for the University of Nebraska Vreeland Howard Award and a four-time winner of the Kimmel Harding Scholarship for Emerging Arts. Wiese, currently based in Lincoln, has curated art shows across her home state for the past four years, with an emphasis on sharing the work of artists of color.

¹ "About," Katharen Wiese, accessed June 13, 2021, <https://www.katwiese.com/contact>.



Affirmations, 2018

Oil and acrylic on panel

50 x 41 in. (127 x 104,1 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Lincoln, Nebraska

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Washington, D.C.

Welmoed Laanstra, Curator
Carolyn Yates, Assistant Curator
Danielle Giampietro, Registrar
Tabitha Brackens, Managing Editor
Tori See, Editor
Megan Pannone, Editor
Amanda Brooks, Imaging Manager

Kampala

Umoja Art Gallery
Kampala Facilities Maintenance
Kampala GSO Property Team
A/GSO Sean Miller

Vienna

Nathalie Mayer, Graphic Designer

Manila

Global Publishing Solutions, Printing



Art in Embassies

U.S. DEPARTMENT *of* STATE

Published by Art in Embassies | U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C. | February 2022
<https://art.state.gov/>