



**Art in Embassies Exhibition**  
United States Embassy Stockholm

**RF. Alvarez** The Homesteaders, 2021  
Acrylic on canvas, 48 x 48 in. (121,9 x 121,9 cm)  
Courtesy of Uprise Art, New York, New York

# 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."

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# Welcome

One great joy of representing the United States as an Ambassador is working with Art in Embassies, the office through which Ambassadors select artwork to exhibit in their Residences that reflects their values, interests, and tastes. I am proud to serve as U.S. Ambassador to Sweden, a country that has been one of our closest partners at the forefront of the fight for LGBTQI+ and other human rights for decades and has been very welcoming to refugees from around the world. Sweden is also internationally known for its art and culture, so here my two passions converge.

As a college freshman, I began a lifelong commitment to fighting for LGBTQI+ rights and the rights of people living with HIV. I was fortunate to meet the love of my life—now my husband, Ranesh—only a short time later. He was a foreign student who, in addition to wanting a great education, had come to the U.S. to escape persecution in his home country.

We embarked on a struggle to achieve permanence and legal recognition of our love which included pushing the government to see that persecution of LGBTQI+ people warrants asylum eligibility in the U.S. After seven years of terrifying uncertainty, our worry that we could be forcibly separated at any time subsided when Ranesh became one of the first to receive immigration status based on fear of persecution as a gay man. We pressed on in our fight against discrimination, for the right to build a family, and for recognition of the human rights and freedoms of millions of others for whom a dangerous wait continues.

We wanted this story reflected in the artwork that adorns the walls of our home in Sweden. A space that not only represents our story as a global, multiracial LGBT family who has found refuge and a platform for activism but also the story of the generations of persecuted communities whose efforts to integrate into and improve American society in ways grand and mundane has shaped the United States of today. Most of the artists we selected are from the LGBTQI+ or asylee and refugee

communities—or both—and their art is alive and infused with their experiences. We wanted the art to inspire guests to view life from a different perspective and think deeply about our shared humanity and how it can oppress and free us.

A few of the works we chose do not depict people; I would argue that all fifteen works are figurative—a study of people and society. For example, Lebanese American artist Helen Zughuib's *The Long Wait* urges us to empathize with the often-indefinite journey millions face as they seek to escape conflict or catastrophe, flee persecution, or just long for a better life outside of their native countries. Cuban-born Ohio artist Augusto Bordelois gathers a well-dressed group of immigrants in *Leaving Home an Autumn Morning*, their patience and dignity palpable even as they face uncertainty on the journey ahead. While Massachusetts artist Christopher Pothier's *The Scrum* asks us to conjure the narrative behind a rugby-like scrum between office workers each aiming to capture and alone possess a coveted briefcase with utter abandon.

Meanwhile, Buenos Aires-born California artist Luciana Abait's *Map of Displacement* uses a three-dimensional folded map and ladders to depict the displacement of refugees from climate-crisis-stricken areas to a more temperate north that is in ever greater peril. And I take great comfort in gay Mexican American Texas artist RF. Alvarez's *The Homesteaders*, which portrays the most ordinary domestic moment—a tender embrace between a gay couple while washing dishes—and speaks volumes about the simple belonging we have fought so hard to achieve as a community. Works by Jack Balas, Kendrick Daye, and Bovey Lee convey similar themes through the powerful use of media such as collage, oil paint, and cut paper.

Many thanks to Art in Embassies for the opportunity to display these wonderful works in my Residence, and to the exceptional artists themselves who lent pieces for this exhibition. As President Kennedy said: "We must never forget that art is not a form of propaganda; it is a form of truth." I hope you will enjoy the truth of these artists and their masterpieces as much as my family and I do.

**Ambassador Erik D. Ramanathan**

*Stockholm, Sweden  
September 2022*

# Luciana Abait

Having emigrated from South America to the United States, Luciana Abait's "metaphorical, poetic, and 'alternate reality' artworks" are deeply rooted in her experiences with assimilation.<sup>1</sup> Her multimedia works center around climate change, environmental instability, and immigration. Both photographs from *Displacement* delve into the "complex layers of urgent climate change matters and human displacement" due to environmental catastrophes.<sup>2</sup> These "photo-based manipulated landscapes" consist of geographical or flight maps with miniature objects that "symbolize territories and frontiers along with the displaced and their plight."<sup>3</sup>

Born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Abait is currently based in California, where she is a resident artist at the 18th Street Arts Center, Santa Monica. She has been featured in several publications, notably the *Los Angeles Times*, *Art Newspaper*, and *Aesthetica*. Her works are held in the permanent collections of Neiman Marcus, Boca Raton, Florida; the Flint Institute of Arts, Michigan; and the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, Washington, D.C.



Figure 1: Map from Displacement Series, 2016  
Photograph, 40 x 60 in. (101,6 ×152,4 cm). Courtesy of the artist, Santa Monica, California



Figure 2: Restricted 2  
from Displacement  
Series, 2019  
Photograph, 30 x 40 in.  
(76,2 ×101,6 cm)  
Courtesy of the artist,  
Santa Monica, California

## RF. Alvarez

Figurative artist RF. Alvarez produces painted narratives from “symbolic motifs and mythical iconography to address issues of identity and culture.”<sup>4</sup> He carefully curates his color palette to create atmospheric environments that emotionally resonate with viewers.<sup>5</sup> “As a gay man, RF. Alvarez grew up believing the idea of a family was something he wouldn’t be able to participate in. When, having moved in with his husband years later, he was washing dishes and his husband gave him a hug, he realized he had achieved the thing that seemed impossible. He belonged.

“The title of this work is a reference to the early settlers of Texas — Homesteaders — who sought opportunity and carved their own way forward in a difficult life. To depict this small moment, at this scale, Alvarez is declaring that he too can carve his own way forward.”<sup>6</sup> Alvarez has said he is dissecting his relationship with his Texan Mexican background, the borderlands of his childhood, and the specific brand of cowboy masculinity that shaped his experiences.

Based in Austin, Texas, Alvarez earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut. His works have been exhibited at Uprise Art, New York, and Ruiz-Healy Gallery, San Antonio.<sup>7</sup>





Figure 3: **The Homesteaders**, 2021  
Acrylic on canvas, 48 x 48 in. (121,9 x 121,9 cm)  
Courtesy of Uprise Art, New York, New York

# Jack Balas

Jack Balas cross-references writing with drawing, painting, and photography. Expanding beyond traditional portraiture, Balas depicts his male subjects in various personal and social situations. Through painted phrases and paragraph-stories, each work takes on the form of “maps and annotated documents” to highlight the “politics of queer and masculine visibility.”<sup>8</sup>

*In the Forest Preserves* contains the following prose: “All those walks in the forest preserves in college, the Little Red Schoolhouse, Enrico Fermi’s concrete foundations before (after?) he moved to the University of Chicago, even the picnic tables carved w/ initials and stuck underneath w/ gum and the ground still sticky, still shining—Little did I realize then that everything did count, that everything would be used in some distant future as an overlooked treasure, brought out now to transcend, to gleam, to redeem. (This is my voice).”<sup>9</sup>



Figure 4: In the Forest Preserves, 2009  
Oil, enamel, and ink on canvas, 48 x 40 in. (121,9 x 101,6 cm)  
Courtesy of William Havu Gallery, Denver, Colorado



Figure 5: REEL TO REEL, 2019  
Oil and enamel on canvas, 40 x 48 in. (101,6 x 121,9 cm)  
Courtesy of William Havu Gallery, Denver, Colorado

*REEL TO REEL* features the painted text in the lower lefthand corner: “For weeks this painting has been elusive—changing directions, erased, painted over, garbled. So today, on the winter solstice, I just give up, watch the sun go down over a yard littered with scraps of snow, my lap littered with scraps of paper Mom wrote on eons ago, notes she kept on TV shows she was recording on equally ancient video tapes. Her handwriting is big loopy letters in pencil, entering titles and durations like some birth record: 1/2-hour Gardening Bob Thomson, 1/2-hour Julia Child Birthday Cake, Phil Donahue, Dick Cavett, Painting on Black Canvas, and then Your New Day. The tapes themselves are long gone, but her writing has endured—and I sense some message other than the words themselves, hidden in invisible ink that only appears when heated. So I feed the notes into my woodstove and I watch as the paper first shrivels and then turns black. On one are lyrics to a hymn she liked to sing, ‘How Great Thou Art,’ but in a sudden burst of flame and light, out instead comes ‘Don’t Dream It’s Over,’ and I know that tomorrow the sun will rise with a new assignment: to wax in a new arc rewind, and replay these words across this, ‘My New Painting.’”<sup>10</sup>

Balas received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree and a Master of Fine Arts degree from Northern Illinois University, DeKalb. He also studied at the Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago, and Salzburg College, Austria. He was a recipient of the Individual Fellowship in Painting from the National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D.C., and artist-in-residence at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver. His work is held in the permanent collections of the Brooklyn Museum, New York; the Albuquerque Museum, New Mexico; and the Usiminas Cultural Center, Ipatinga, Brazil.



# Augusto Bordelois

Cuban American artist Augusto Bordelois creates oil paintings that reflect his search for a sense of home as an immigrant and express how others perceive his immigrant “status.”<sup>11</sup> Bordelois writes poetry, songs, and other musings before starting a new series of artworks; while adding to his series throughout two to five years, he reviews what he composed to keep himself centered.<sup>12</sup>

## **Intolerance**

My neighbor thinks that I’m different. I never thought that my skin, my eyes, my walk, my accent matter[ed] that much. My neighbor thinks I came to steal his job, his wife, to rape his daughter. He told me so. My neighbor thinks my kids are different, that they are rude because they are loud and happy. My neighbor thinks that my girls are obscene because of the way they walk and dress. My neighbor doesn’t let his kids play with [mine]. My neighbor says that he will defend his family from mine. He told me so. My neighbor is angry at my blindness. My neighbor explains to me where he came from and where I came from. “We are foreigners in a foreign country.” I told him so. My neighbor is livid at my idiocy. My neighbor explains to me who his grandfather was and who my grandfather was. “They were foreigners in a foreign country.” I told him so. My neighbor spat each word at me. My neighbor wants me to see that he is different. My neighbor wants me to be his enemy.<sup>13</sup>



Figure 6: **Leaving Home an Autumn Morning**, c. 2010-2016  
Oil on canvas, 48 x 72 in. (121,9 x 182,9 cm)  
Courtesy of the artist, Berea, Ohio

## Immigrants

It was your choice. You left home on a Sunday morning wearing your best clothes as if you were going to visit the doctor. Your suitcase was packed with what you thought indispensable for your Odyssey, but soon, it turned out to be useless mementos that burdened your stride.

You ran away from death, persecution, intolerance, ignorance, abuse, hunger, and poverty. Those might have been reasons or not. Who remembers? It might have been that you came to explore, to look for adventure, for the mysterious need to prove yourself among strangers. You crossed borders, deserts, fences, and tunnels, [and] swam rivers and oceans too. You tore out your sails, burned as many bridges as you encountered, and forgot your way back. You knew your weakness, and the temptation to give up was powerful.

Finally, you arrived and did whatever you had to do to survive the next morning. You were homesick and cried; you still do when you remember. Eventually, you settled down and adjusted to your new surroundings. In the process, you rebuilt your homeland from the pieces of a memory fading in your eyes. You owed it to the ones left behind.<sup>14</sup>

Bordelois graduated from the University of Havana, Cuba, with a major in English language and literature. Previously a guest lecturer at two Ohio schools: Baldwin Wallace University, Berea, and the Cleveland Institute of Art, he is a teaching artist at the Ohio Arts Council, Columbus, and the Center for Arts-Inspired Learning, Cleveland. His work is held in the collections of Cleveland State University and the Artists Archives of the Western Reserve, Cleveland.





Figure 7: Trampled by Texans, c. 2010-2016  
Oil on canvas, 36 x 60 in. (91,4 x 152,4 cm)  
Courtesy of the artist, Berea, Ohio

# Kendrick Daye

Multimedia artist, designer, and art director Kendrick Daye captures the kaleidoscopic fantasies of LGBTQ+ and Black life in his digital and analog collages. Analog collages are disassembled forms—colored paper, newspapers, magazines, photographs—that are glued to a surface and “break from classical artistic conventions.”<sup>15</sup> Utilizing diverse approaches to art making—whether they be art direction, bespoke design, music, or collages—Daye seeks to “add images to the narrative of [B]lack queer media that define beauty on [his] own terms.”<sup>16</sup> In his collages, several images are in one place, often in distorted focus, for the purpose of the viewer’s enjoyment.<sup>17</sup> Daye states: “I have been witness, firstly in myself but also in others, to the profound changes art can have on an individual’s perception, mood, and life. There’s a void of work that does this that centers [B]lack queer life. I create work because I want to see images that laud, legislate, and promulgate on the behalf of a [B]lack queer utopia.”<sup>18</sup>

Born in Miami, Daye graduated from Morehouse College, Atlanta, and relocated to Harlem, New York, where he gained exposure to the “culture found in America’s Black meccas.”<sup>19</sup> His artistic career began as a photographer before working on a pop art project that led him to collaging.<sup>20</sup> Daye is the creator of the Black Queer Tarot, a seventy-eight-card Tarot arcana deck that depicts subjects from the Black LGBTQ+ community. He has exhibited his work at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center, New York, and Art Basel Miami.



Figure 8: **Can't Let Anybody Hold Me**, 2021

Collage on wood panel,  
12 x 12 in. (30,5 x 30,5 cm)  
Courtesy of the artist,  
New York, New York



Figure 9: **Plaything**, 2020

Collage on wood panel,  
10 x 10 in. (25,4 x 25,4 cm)  
Courtesy of the artist,  
New York, New York

# Christopher Pothier

Christopher Pothier is a representational figure painter who focuses on “narrative storytelling.”<sup>21</sup> Using oil as his medium, he paints in the style of Italian and Dutch Old Masters and presents “philosophical allegories that invite the viewer to contemplate social, civil, and very intimate issues.” Part of his *Nine to Five* series, *the scrum* examines the corporate world borne out of the 2008 economic recession. People in business attire are locked in a “rugby scrum” as they wrestle on a checkerboard tile floor and try to seize an unknown but precious item in the suitcase.<sup>22</sup> In *after the fire, a random procession commenced*, Pothier includes businesspeople walking from the wreckage of an old mill building. Questioning the responsibility of the figures, this painting loosely narrates a conflict between subjects and allows for viewer interpretation.<sup>23</sup>

Pothier teaches painting at the Maryhill Museum of Art, Washington, and was previously an instructor at the Dalles Art Center, Oregon, and the Kimball Jenkins School of Art, Concord, New Hampshire, after graduating from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Since 1999, he has owned CWA Pothier Fine Art, where he produces murals, commissioned paintings, and decorative finishes for residential and commercial clients.<sup>24</sup> Pothier’s works were shown at the European Museum of Modern Art, Barcelona; the Salmagundi Club, New York; and the Columbia Center for the Arts, Hood River, Oregon.



Figure 10: **the scrum**, 2014. Oil on panel, 33 x 60 in. (83,8 x 152,4 cm). Courtesy of the artist, The Dalles, Oregon



Figure 11: **after the fire, a random procession commenced**, 2014  
Oil on panel, 28 x 48 in. (71,1 x 121,9 cm). Courtesy of the artist, The Dalles, Oregon

# Bovey Lee

Bovey Lee has been creating hand-cut paper and site-specific installations since 2005. Her cut paperwork explores multifaceted aspects of migration: diaspora, lineage, displacement and the rebuilding of home, and familial separation.<sup>25</sup> Composed of elaborate hand-cut Chinese rice paper, *Star-Girl on Rose Border* “draws on immigrants’ personal experiences” and “affirms our shared desire for a sense of community, societal acceptance, and belonging.”<sup>26</sup> Depicted is a figure of a child “alone and seeking comfort and stability through play, while staying afloat in the transitory ocean with poise and courage.”<sup>27</sup> The star references the American flag, while the rose symbolizes the national flower of the United States.<sup>28</sup>

Born in Hong Kong, Lee received her Bachelor of Arts degree from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, China, and two Master of Fine Arts degrees, one from the University of California, Berkeley, and the other in digital arts from the Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York. She has received numerous accolades, and her works have been exhibited at the Fuller Craft Museum, Brockton, Massachusetts and the Museum Bellerive, Zurich.





Figure 12: **Star-Girl on Rose Border**, 2018  
Chinese Xuan paper on silk, 41 x 43 in. (104,1 x 109,2 cm)  
Courtesy of Rena Bransten Gallery, San Francisco, California

# Robert Rauschenberg

Considered the “forerunner of essentially every postwar movement since Abstract Expressionism,” Robert Rauschenberg was a painter, sculptor, and graphic artist who revolutionized American art in the 1950s and 1960s. Rauschenberg’s work represents a constant dialogue “between the handmade and the readymade, and between the gestural brushstroke and the mechanically reproduced image.” Throughout his six-decade career, his art incorporated technology, choreography and performance, and materials that span across media. Made using an Iris printer to create digital color prints of his photographs, later silkscreen works like *Domicile* “allowed for the high-resolution images and luminous hues in his large-scale works on paper.”<sup>29</sup>

Rauschenberg studied at the Kansas City Art Institute, Missouri, and Académie Julian, Paris, before attending Black Mountain College, Asheville, North Carolina, under instructor and German abstract artist Josef Albers. Upon moving to New York City in 1949, he gained exposure to abstract expressionism and began incorporating free and loose brushwork in his paintings. In 1954, Rauschenberg created his first *Combine* painting. This series broke down traditional barriers between painting and sculpture by combining discarded, ordinary objects—like patchwork quilts or automobile tires—and placing them in the context of art.<sup>30</sup> His first solo exhibition at the Jewish Museum, New York, and the 1963 International Grand Prize at the Venice Biennale established his artistic reputation for years to come.





Figure 13: **Domicile**, 1996

Silkscreen, 48 x 34 ½ in. (121,9 x 87,6 cm)

Courtesy of the Foundation for Art and Preservation in Embassies, Washington, D.C.; Gift of the artist

# Helen Zughaib

“I am interested in telling stories about people. I am interested in providing another way to look at the world through my works,”<sup>31</sup> said Helen Zughaib, whose practice embodies themes of displacement and acceptance. Drawing on her Middle Eastern roots, Zughaib uses bold colors, strong patterns, and definable shapes and scenes to amplify the plight of migrants, immigrants, and refugees—especially women, “to give voice to the voiceless, to heal, and to reflect in our shared humanity.”<sup>32</sup> Contextualizing the Arab Spring that began in 2010 and resulted in the Syrian war, *Generations Lost* features women clothed in multicolored patterns, holding worn photographs of loved ones lost to war as they escalate up the composition. *The Long Wait* was inspired by Zughaib’s observation of women standing shoulder-to-shoulder in line for food, water, and shelter at refugee camps.<sup>33</sup>

A Washington, D.C.-based Lebanese artist, Zughaib earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the College of Visual and Performing Arts at Syracuse University, New York. She has served as a cultural envoy to Palestine, Switzerland, and Saudi Arabia. Her work is in the permanent collections of the White House, Washington, D.C.; the Arab American National Museum, Dearborn, Michigan; and the Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates.



Figure 14: **Generations Lost**, 2014  
Archival pigment print, 50 x 40 in. (127 x 101,6 cm)  
Courtesy of the artist, Washington, D.C.





Figure 15: The Long Wait, 2021  
Gouache on board, 48 ½ x 38 in. (123,2 x 96,5 cm)  
Courtesy of the artist, Washington, D.C.

## Endnotes

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