



Art in Embassies Exhibition
United States Embassy Lilongwe

Tim Davis
Do you see us #3, 2020
Oil on wood, 22 x 26 in. (55,9 x 66 cm)
Courtesy of the artist, Falls Church, Virginia

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/>

Resilience in Community

For me as U.S. Ambassador in Malawi, one of the most powerful threads in the diverse tapestry of the American story is our continuing struggle for social justice, community, and human dignity. It is an ongoing struggle that sometimes can feel discouraging as we lurch forward and back, striving to create more equitable societies, both at home and around the world. Diane and I find inspiration for our journey in international service through the artworks of creative talents who share their ideals on their amazing canvases.

We are deeply honored that through Art in Embassies, we can display in our home in Malawi more than a dozen extraordinary works by African American artists who offer glimpses of Black and Brown lives in our country. We selected works that exemplify the theme “Resilience in Community” and intermixed them with other artworks from Malawi, Zambia, and Nigeria from our own collection to create an artistic dialogue about the meaning of community across Africa and the African diaspora.

Our exhibition contains multiple works by two Washington, D.C.-based artists whom Diane and I got to know before we left for Lilongwe – Tim Davis and Charles Philippe Jean-Pierre (“JP”). We instantly connected with both. Tim and JP fuse their art with their strong commitments to social justice. Tim’s works *WE as a people, Do you see us #3*, and *Mr. President* exemplify his passionate belief that activism and advocacy are essential to the struggle for equal rights for all people. JP shows resilience

and tenderness in *Autobiography of My Mother II* and *The Necessity of Remembering II*. Likewise, our exhibition contains inspirational works by Synthia Saint James, including her *Resilience* and *Women Lifting Their Voices*. And we also are honored to display M. Florine Démosthène's *Illumination #12* and two powerful mixed media pieces by Gwendolyn D. Aquí-Brooks.

We were honored that this exhibition was first unveiled to the public on Embassy Lilongwe's national day of celebration of the Juneteenth holiday. The amazing art was interspersed among a display of photos that told stories of resilience from the campaign to abolish slavery in the United States to the continuing struggles for civil rights and equal rights for all Americans. That exhibition was seen by hundreds of Malawians – from senior government leaders to grassroots civil society activists. All left inspired, as are we, by the power of this art.

We would like to express our appreciation to Art in Embassies, especially Tiffany Williams and Ashlee Forbes; the extraordinary artists who lent their works; and our wonderful team members at Embassy Lilongwe, who prepared the exhibition. This magnificent exhibition inspires us and the visitors to our Residence each day.

Ambassador David Young

*Lilongwe, Malawi
December 2022*

Gwendolyn D. Aqui-Brooks (born 1947)

"Art is my life! I feel alive when I'm creating, whether it be an art quilt, painting, or doll," says mixed-media artist Gwendolyn Aqui-Brooks.¹ Much of the inspiration for her paintings, art quilts, one-of-a-kind soft sculpture dolls, and works on paper comes from her travels to places like Brazil, Turkey, Greece, Venice, West Africa, and Trinidad and Tobago. Rather than work from sketches, her creative process always begins with a circle. Representations of figures, faces, patterns, plant forms, and symbols merge to produce dazzling compositions.²

Washington-D.C.-based Aqui-Brooks has been honored with awards and exhibitions by many institutions, including the Maryland State Art Council, the National Association of Women Artists, and the National Commission on Arts and Letters. Her works are held in public and corporate collections both locally and abroad. Aqui-Brooks received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in art education from Howard University, Washington, D.C., and a Master of Arts degree in education from Trinity College.

Figure 1:
Peace Be Still, 2014
Mixed media
30 x 40 in. (76,2 x 101,6 cm)
Courtesy of the artist,
Washington, D.C.



Figure 2:
Waiting Mystic, 2014
Mixed media
30 x 40 in. (76,2 x 101,6 cm)
Courtesy of the artist,
Washington, D.C.



Tim Davis (born 1955)

"My focus has been to utilize themes that represent interactions of relationships between stylized figures and portraits within environments or abstract settings...With painting on an unconventional surface such as Plexiglas, I utilize the transparent and reflective quality with various materials, such as graphite, sculpture materials, acrylic, photography, pen and ink, and re-assemble and tell stories of [the] human spirit."

Tim Davis's signature portrait style leaves the faces blank without expression to let the viewer see more through the form, line, and color. Concerned for the human experience and the Black experience, his depicted subjects are based on people he met throughout his life. Davis was born in Chicago and earned a Master of Arts degree from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. His work has been exhibited in Colombia, Russia, and throughout the United States, including Chicago, Miami, New York, Puerto Rico, and Washington, D.C. Davis is the founder and owner of International Visions Gallery, where he promotes and provides contemporary multicultural works by national and international artists to museums, private collectors, and art enthusiasts. He lives in the Washington, D.C., area.



*Figure 3: **Do you see us #3**, 2020*
Oil on wood
22 x 26 in. (55,9 x 66 cm)
Courtesy of the artist, Falls Church, Virginia



Figure 4: **Blue Waiting**, 2008
Acrylic on plexi, photography
26 x 40 in. (66 x 101,6 cm)
Courtesy of the artist, Falls Church, Virginia

Figure 5: **Mr. President**, 2008
Acrylic on plexi, collage
16 x 36 in. (40,6 x 91,4 cm)
Courtesy of the artist, Falls Church, Virginia

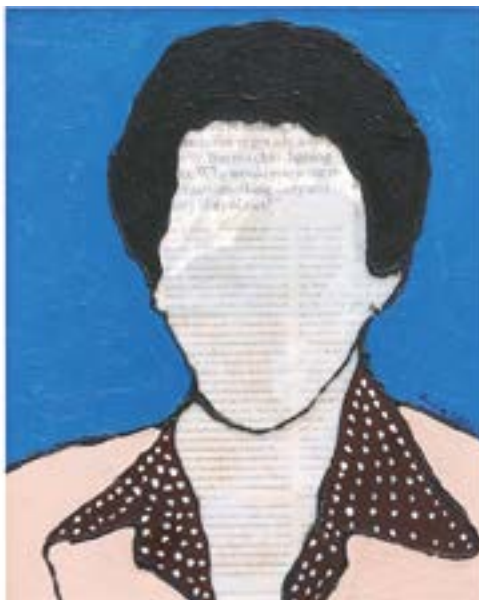




Figure 6: **We the people of the Afro Beat**, 2019

Acrylic on plexi, graphite, collage

28 x 36 in. (71,1 x 91,4 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Falls Church, Virginia



Figure 7: **WE as a people**, 2019
Acrylic on plexi and canvas, graphite
28 x 40 in. (71,1 x 101,6 cm)
Courtesy of the artist, Falls Church, Virginia

M. Florine Démosthène

M. Florine Démosthène's mixed-media and collage works "posit the Black female body as a myriad of collective experiences beyond immediate interpretations based on sensuality and fetishization. Her ample-shaped figures are largely autobiographical with depictions capturing folds, curves, child-bearing, and other recognizable feminine attributes." Using an almost alchemical process she discovered when several pens exploded in her bag, staining the mylar inside, allows her to be unpredictable instead of searching for perfection.³

Démosthène was born in the United States and raised in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and New York, earning a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Parsons School of Design in New York and a Master of Fine Arts degree from Hunter College City University of New York. She has exhibited extensively throughout the United States, the Caribbean, Europe, and Africa; is the recipient of a Watchmeister Award, Tulsa Artist Fellowship, Arts Moves Africa Grant, and a Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant; and has participated in residencies in the United States, the Caribbean, the United Kingdom, Slovakia, Ghana, and Tanzania. Her work is part of the Africa First Collection, the PFF collection of African American Art, and various private collections worldwide.⁴



Figure 8:
Illumination #12, 2018
Collage (ink and mylar) on
paper
12 x 9 in. (30,5 x 22,9 cm)
Courtesy of the artist,
Tulsa, Oklahoma

Charles Phillippe Jean-Pierre (born 1984)

Haitian American artist Charles Phillippe Jean-Pierre's practice recognizes the erasure of our complex histories and challenges the narrative that we only exist in the physical realm. Known for his murals of vivid color and bold content, his work ranges from multimedia collages to conceptual designs, often incorporating graffiti and folk art and speaking to political, social, and economic concerns. "I view my painting as a tool to reflect, inspire, and critique society," he says.

Jean-Pierre is an adjunct professor of fine art at American University in Washington, D.C., and the National Arts Director for the Young and Powerful Group. He was invited by President Obama to discuss the role of art education in promoting national youth justice and guest lectured at Stanford University, California, regarding a positive vision of Haiti through the Mamelodi project. His work has been highlighted by numerous media outlets, including the *Washington Post*, *Ebony*, the *Village Voice*, BET, NBC, and Netflix, among others, and he has created public art murals in South Africa, Panama, Turkey, Canada, Haiti, France, England, Chicago, New York, and Washington, D.C.



Figure 9:
Autobiography of My Mother II, 2021
Acrylic collage on canvas with lace
36 x 36 in. (91,4 x 91,4 cm)
Courtesy of the artist, Washington, D.C.



Figure 10:
The Necessity of Remembering II, 2021
Acrylic collage on canvas with lace
36 x 36 in. (91,4 x 91,4 cm)
Courtesy of the artist, Washington, D.C.

Consuelo Kanaga (1894–1978)

Consuelo Kanaga, born Consuelo Delesseps Kanaga, was an American photographer and writer who became well-known for her advocacy for and photographs of African Americans and other people of color. Her photos conveyed her subjects' comfort and pride, setting them apart from those taken by the Farm Security Administration documenting rural poverty after the Great Depression.⁵ She was one of few White American photographers in the 1930s to make artistic portraits of African Americans.

Kanaga, one of the pioneers of modern American photography, began her career as a photojournalist in 1915 at the *San Francisco Chronicle*, where she taught herself to take photographs to accompany her articles. Working at a time when photography was becoming an established medium, she joined the California Camera Club, and later exhibited with f.64, a group of photographers including Ansel Adams, who became a close friend. Bicoastal for many years, she eventually moved to New York, continuing her journalistic career at Hearst's *New York American* and then freelancing.⁶



Figure 11: **Hands**, 1930
Archival black and white copy print, 18 ⁵/₁₆ x 25 ¹⁵/₁₆ in. (46,5 x 65,9 cm)
Collection of Art in Embassies, Washington, D.C.;
Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Wallace B. Putnam from the Estate of Consuelo Kanaga

Bob Krist

Bob Krist is a renowned freelance travel photographer who regularly works on assignment for magazines such as *National Geographic Traveler*, *Smithsonian*, and *Islands*. These assignments have taken him to all seven continents. He counts among his many adventures being stranded on a glacier in Iceland as well as being nearly run down by charging bulls in southern India. An accomplished writer as well as a photographer, Krist is a contributing editor at both *National Geographic Traveler* and *Outdoor Photographer*, where he writes a travel photography column. He also lectures in Washington, D.C., as part of the ongoing "Live at the National Geographic" series and teaches photography. Krist hosts the PBS special "Restoration Stories," which takes the viewer on a memorable journey to meet incredible people in some out-of-the-way places. Krist lives with his wife Peggy in New Hope, Pennsylvania.



Figure 12: **French Quarter Evening**, undated
Poster, 16 ½ x 16 ½ in. (41 x 41 cm). Collection of Art in Embassies, Washington, D.C.

Synthia Saint James (born 1949)

Synthia Saint James is a self-taught artist known for her paintings and prints that honor diverse racial and ethnic identities, particularly those of the African diaspora. Her figures are composed of simplified, geometric forms and bright, highly saturated colors. Inspired by the vibrant marketplaces of Martinique, Saint James challenged herself to paint groups of people without facial features, emphasizing posture and clothing styles to identify their cultural heritage.⁷ Saint James also credits her family for her creative ambition, explaining, "I believe a lot of my color and themes comes from my DNA."⁸

Born in Los Angeles, Saint James sold her first painting at the age of twenty. Since then, her work has been featured on more than fifty book covers, including those by celebrated authors Alice Walker and Terry McMillan. Since 1990, Saint James has completed commissions for major corporations, nonprofit organizations, and individual collectors, including the House of Seagram, the Los Angeles Women's Foundation, UNICEF, and the Girl Scouts of America's 85th Anniversary commemoration. The United States Postal Service also commissioned the artist to create the first Kwanzaa Stamp, released in 1997.



Figure 13: **Women Lifting their Voices**, 2014
Giclee on canvas
34 x 24 in. (86,4 x 61 cm)
Courtesy of the artist, Los Angeles, California



Figure 14: **Resilience**, 2018
Giclee on canvas
34 x 24 in. (86,4 x 61 cm)
Courtesy of the artist, Los Angeles, California

Rowland Scherman (born 1937)

On August 28, 1963, more than 200,000 Americans gathered in Washington, D.C., for a political rally known as the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Organized by several civil rights and religious groups, the event was designed to shed light on the political and social challenges African Americans continued to face across the country. The march, which became a key moment in the growing struggle for civil rights in the United States, culminated in the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, a spirited call for racial justice and equality.

Rowland Scherman's photographs have appeared in *Life*, *Look*, *National Geographic*, and *Time*, among others. He photographed many of the iconic musical, cultural, and political events of the 1960s, including the 1963 Newport Folk Festival, the March on Washington, D.C., the Beatles' first U.S. concert, and Woodstock. He traveled with Robert "Bobby" F. Kennedy on his campaign for the presidency, documented the early years of the Peace Corps, went on tour with singer Judy Collins, and was in the studio when the folk-rock group Crosby, Stills & Nash recorded their first album. In 1968, he won a Grammy Award for the cover photo of Bob Dylan's Greatest Hits. Scherman continued to shoot portraits, fashion photography, and photo essays including *Elvis is Everywhere*, *Love Letters (a freestanding human typeface)*, and *US 11* documenting life along the Alabama highway. He currently lives in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, and is still actively engaged in photography.⁹

Figure 15:
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
speaking at the Civil Rights
March on Washington, D.C.
28 August 1963, 1963
Photograph
21 x 17 ½ in. (53,3 x 44,5 cm)
Collection of Art in Embassies,
Washington, D.C.; Courtesy of
the U.S. National Archives and
Records Administration, ARC
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Veloy Vigil (1931–1997)

Painter Veloy Vigil's "observation of color, space, and light is translated into abstract expressionist images."¹⁰ Working in both watercolor and acrylic, Vigil was known for his use of bold colors and shapes to convey motion and emotion in Native American figures and aspects of New Mexican culture.¹¹ Born in Colorado and descended from a great-grandmother who was a Pueblo Native American, and a great-grandfather who was Spanish, Vigil attended the Colorado Institute of the Arts by day and Denver Art Academy by night. He worked as a commercial artist, illustrator, and art director while developing his technique and exhibiting in shows. His works are in public and private collections around the world, including the Heard Museum in Phoenix and the Sir Andrew Grimwade collection in Melbourne, Australia.



Figure 16: **Untitled**, undated

Oil on canvas, 28 ½ x 36 ¼ in. (72,4 x 92,1 cm)

Courtesy of Wilma and Stuart Bernstein, Washington, D.C., and Suellen and Melvyn J. Estrin, Bethesda, Maryland
the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, ARC 542069/306-SSM-4D(107)16

Charles Wilbert White (1918–1979)

Draftsman, printmaker, and painter Charles Wilbert White believed that art could be a force for social change: "Art must be an integral part of the struggle. It can't simply mirror what's taking place. It must adapt itself to human needs. It must ally itself with the forces of liberation. The fact is, artists have always been propagandists. I have no use for artists who try to divorce themselves from the struggle."¹² White's works primarily focused on showcasing the humanity and beauty of African American culture, creating what he called "images of dignity."¹³

White lived in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles throughout his career, working primarily in black and white or sepia and white drawings, paintings, and lithographs that contained an artistic sensitivity and power that has reached and moved millions. He received numerous honors and awards and has been exhibited at the Art Institute of Chicago; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; the National Academy of Design, New York; and elsewhere throughout the world. He was elected to the National Academy of Design in 1972.¹⁴



Figure 17: **Mother and Child**, 1953

Lithograph, 22 ½ x 25 in. (57,2 x 63,5 cm)

Collection of Art in Embassies, Washington, D.C. Gift of S.E. Mansfield

The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, ARC 542069/306-SSM-4D(107)16

Endnotes

- 1 ["The Three Piece: Gwendolyn Aquí-Brooks," Black Art in America, accessed April 29, 2022](#)
- 2 ["About," Gwendolyn Aquí-Brooks, Accessed April 28, 2022.](#)
- 3 ["Multiple Representations: Florine Démosthène interviewed by Jareh Das," BOMB, December 10, 2109.](#)
- 4 ["Home," M. FLORINE DÉMOSTHÈNE, Accessed April 28, 2022.](#)
- 5 [Meredith Fisher, "Artist Consuelo Kanga: Biography," International Center of Photography, accessed April 29, 2022.](#)
- 6 ["Consuelo Kanaga: An American Photographer," Brooklyn Museum, Accessed April 28, 2022.](#)
- 7 ["Meet the Artist: Synthia Saint James," Framebridge, accessed May 5, 2021.](#)
- 8 [Melanie Eversley, "Synthia Saint James Talks Her Love of Color and Healing Through Art," NBC News, October 29, 2017.](#)
- 9 ["Biography," Rowland Sherman Photography, accessed April 29, 2022.](#)
- 10 ["The Vivid West of Veloy Vigil \(1931-1997\)," The Hubbard Museum of the American West, accessed May 2, 2022.](#)
- 11 ["Veloy Vigil: About the Author," Michael McCormick & Sons Gallery, accessed May 2, 2022.](#)
- 12 ["Charles White," MoMA, accessed May 2, 2022.](#)
- 13 ["Charles White."](#)
- 14 ["Charles Wilbert White \(1918-1979\)," Heritage Gallery, accessed May 2, 2022.](#)

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