

# ART IN EMBASSIES

# LONDON ART IN EMBASSIES





E PLURIBUS

# ART IN EMBASSIES LONDON



The nineteen works of art that reside at the U.S. Embassy London present an inspiring picture of the contributions being made by artists from the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Republic of Ireland at this time. Considered together, the collection is representative of Art in Embassies' mission of cultural exchange and highlights the powerful presence that art can lend to public spaces.

Visitors to the building will encounter a group of works that are united through their diversity. Monumental installations by Mark Bradford, Rachel Whiteread, and Cerith Wyn Evans exist next to intimate drawings by Richard Long and Barbara Walker. Photographs by Idris Khan and Catherine Opie take iconic landscapes as their starting point—in Khan's case, five architectural landmarks in London; Opie's subjects are Niagara Falls and California's Lake Kaweah. Alison Watt provides the only oil painting in the collection, and Eva Rothschild's towering sculpture is the first artwork visitors encounter upon entering the central space/lobby. The grounds of the Embassy feature works that evolve through their materials: Jay Heikes's installation is an experiment in bronze and quartz, Jenny Holzer's project consists of engravings of written texts into stone walls, and Sean Scully creates a mosaic from painted glass. The collection's only virtual work is produced by Hays and Ryan Holladay, who have designed a sound app that corresponds with designated areas outside of the building.

The Art in Embassies collection, curated by Virginia Shore, former deputy director and chief curator, includes many works devised especially for the building. The collection acts as an inauguration and celebration of diplomacy through art in the Embassy's new headquarters, designed by Philadelphia-based architecture firm Kieran Timberlake. The nineteen works that populate U.S. Embassy London take center stage, integrating with the structural properties of the building and forming an innate part of the visitor experience.

In giving voices to these leading U.S., U.K., and Irish artists working at the forefront of contemporary art and making their work accessible to wide audiences, a bigger picture is envisaged—one of shared culture.



<b>8</b>	MARK BRADFORD
<b>14</b>	JAY HEIKES
<b>22</b>	JENNY HOLZER
<b>30</b>	SEAN SCULLY
<b>38</b>	BARBARA WALKER
<b>44</b>	RACHEL WHITEREAD
<b>52</b>	RYAN AND HAYS HOLLADAY
<b>54</b>	IDRIS KHAN
<b>60</b>	RICHARD LONG
<b>64</b>	CATHERINE OPIE
<b>68</b>	EVA ROTHSCHILD
<b>72</b>	ALISON WATT
<b>76</b>	CERITH WYN EVANS

**1 Mark Bradford**  
*We the People*, 2017  
Mixed media on canvas  
Each of 32 panels: 10 ft x 10 ft  
(3.05 m x 3.05 m)

**2 Jay Heikes**  
*Quintessence*, 2018  
Bronze and quartz  
Star 1: 55 in x 93 in (139.7 x 236.2 cm)  
Star 2: 68 in x 79 in (172.7 x 200.7 cm)  
Star 3: 70 in x 78 in (177.8 x 198.1 cm)

**3 Jenny Holzer**  
*The Waging of Peace*, 2018  
Engraved Cornish granite

**4 Sean Scully**  
*Golden Frieze*, 2017–2018  
Mosaic  
Each panel: 17 ft x 9 ft, 153 ft<sup>2</sup>  
(5.18 m x 2.74 m, 14.21 m<sup>2</sup>)  
Overall: 17 ft x 104.333333 ft, 1,773.67 ft<sup>2</sup>  
(5.18 m x 31.8 m, 164.8 m<sup>2</sup>)

**5 Barbara Walker**  
*The Form of Her I*, 2019  
Charcoal and Conté on paper  
72 in x 48 in (182.88 cm x 121.92 cm)

**6 Barbara Walker**  
*The Form of Her II*, 2019  
Charcoal and Conté on paper  
84 in x 48 in (213.36 cm x 121.92 cm)

**7 Rachel Whiteread**  
*U.S. Embassy (Flat pack house)*,  
2013–2015  
Cast concrete  
Inside section:  
H: 252.8 in (642 cm)  
W: 590.6 in (1,500 cm)  
Space between the inside and outside  
sections:  
W: 27.6 in (70 cm)  
Outside section:  
H: 252.8 in (642 cm)  
W: 417.3 in (1,060 cm)  
Overall:  
H: 252.8 in (642 cm)  
W: 1,035.4 in (2,630 cm)

**8 Ryan and Hays Holladay**  
*Site: Wandsworth*, 2018  
Soundwork (iOS and Android app)  
19.07 minutes long

**9 Idris Khan**  
*Tower Bridge*, London, 2015  
*London Eye*, London, 2015  
*Buckingham Palace*, London, 2015  
*St. Paul's*, London, 2015  
*The Houses of Parliament*, London, 2015  
Platinum–Palladium prints on Fabriano  
Artistico E.W.S 300 gsm paper  
Each, unframed: 24 3/16 in x 30 1/8 in  
(61.5 cm x 76.5 cm)

**10 Richard Long**  
*Untitled*, 2019  
China clay on wood board  
5 1/4 ft x 13 1/8 ft (1.6 m x 4 m)

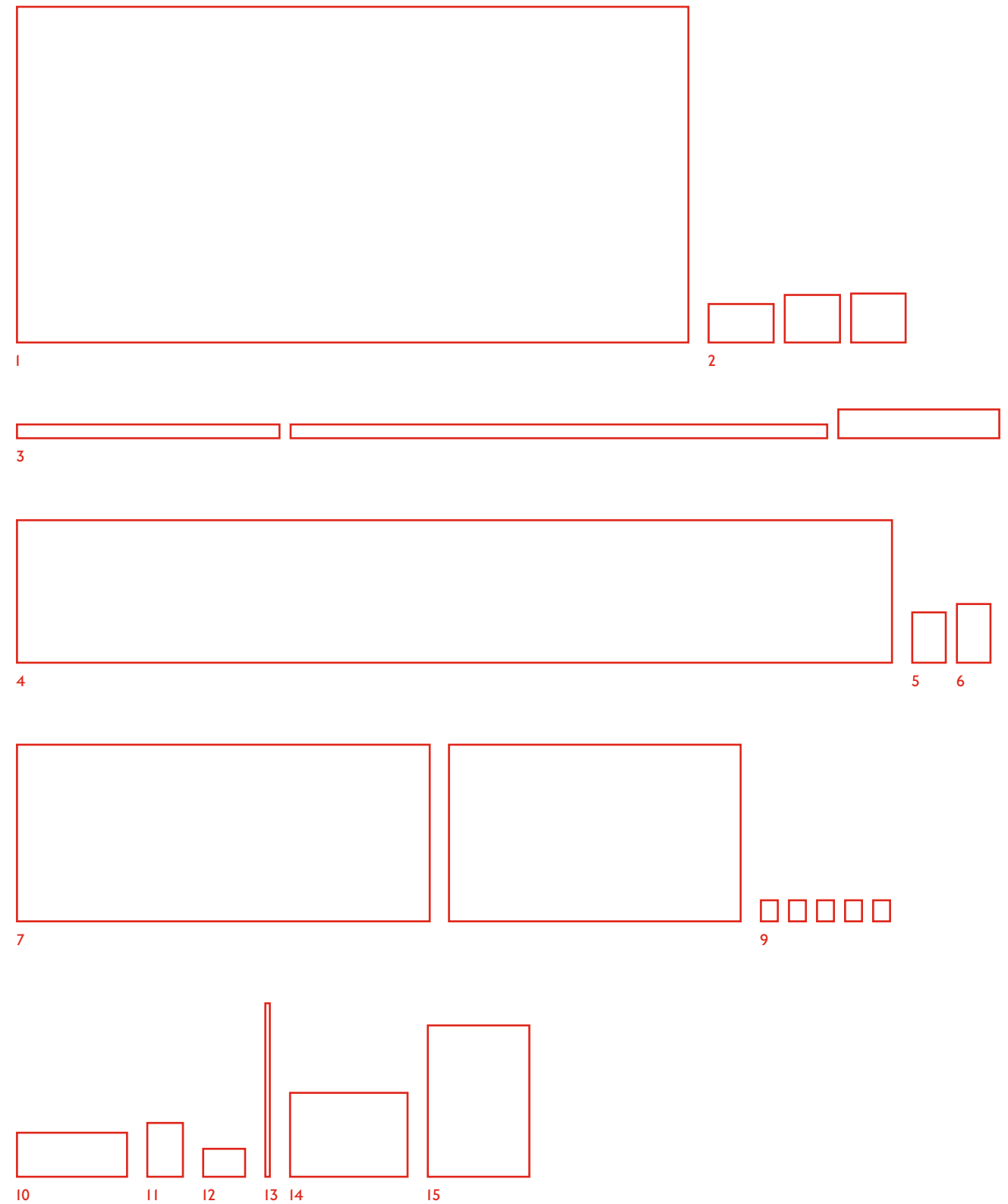
**11 Catherine Opie**  
*Untitled #10*, 2013  
Pigment print  
77 in x 51 in (195.6 cm x 129.5 cm)

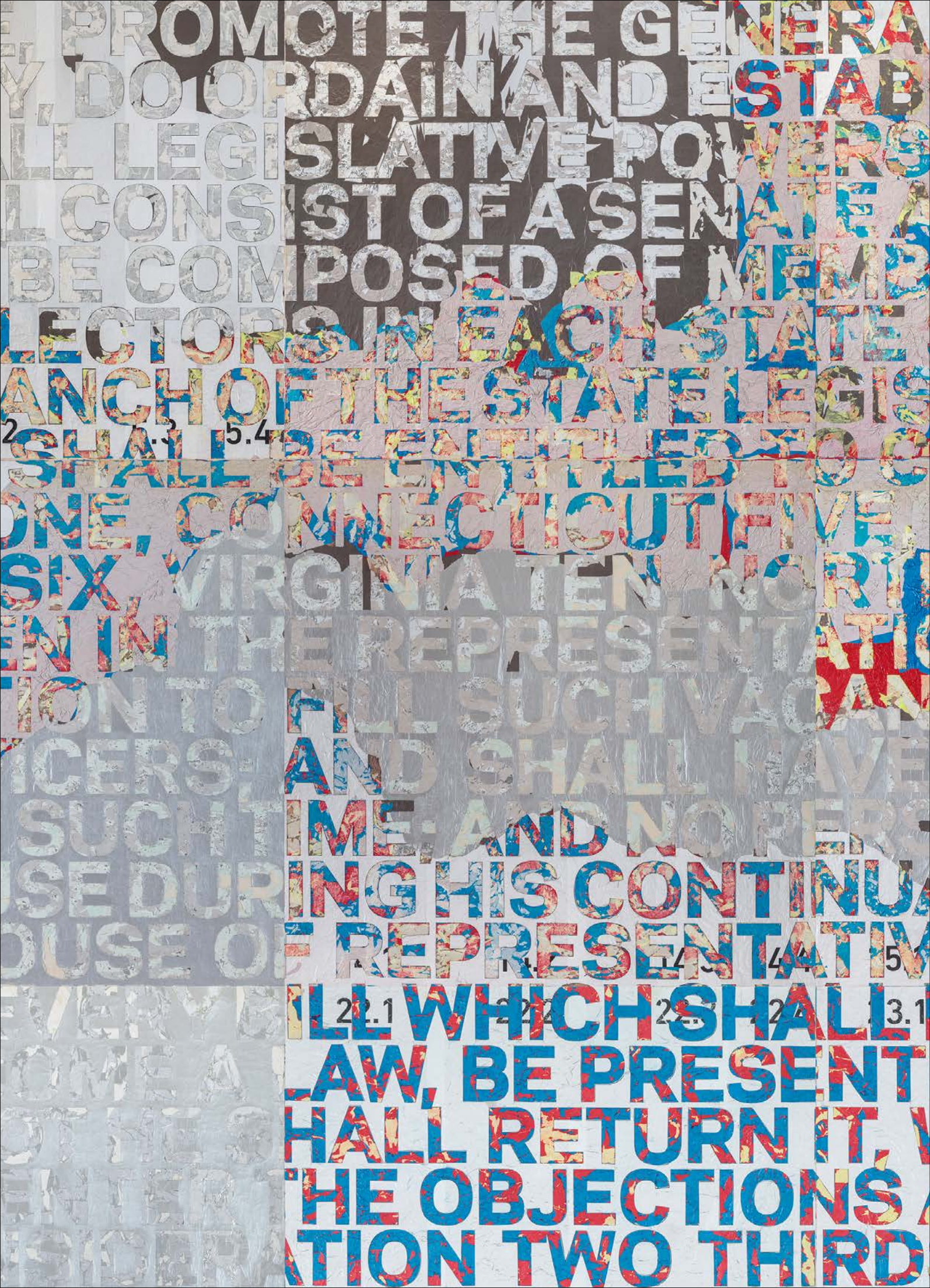
**12 Catherine Opie**  
*Untitled #11*, 2013  
Pigment print  
40 in x 60 in (101.6 cm x 152.4 cm)

**13 Eva Rothschild**  
*Technical Support*, 2016  
Jesmonite, Steel  
20 ft 4 in (height) x 3.5 in to 6 in (diameter)  
(6.23 m (height) x 8.89 cm x 15.24 cm  
(diameter))

**14 Alison Watt**  
*Host, pinwheel*, 2006–2018  
Oil on canvas  
Overall: 10 ft x 14 ft (3.05 m x 4.27 m)

**15 Cerith Wyn Evans**  
*Neon Forms (after Noh IV)*, 2017  
White neon  
18 ft x 12 ft x 11 4/5 ft (5.50 m x 3.69 m x  
3.60 m)





# Mark Bradford

*We the People*, 2017  
Mixed media on canvas  
Each of 32 panels: 10 ft x 10 ft (3.05 m x 3.05 m)

*We the People*, a painting by American artist Mark Bradford, consists of thirty-two canvases that have been joined together to create a monumental, multicolored composition spanning nearly forty feet in height and eighty feet in length. Conceived specifically for the main wall within the Embassy's atrium, the floor-to-ceiling work forms an arresting centerpiece that took a year to complete and over two weeks to install on site.

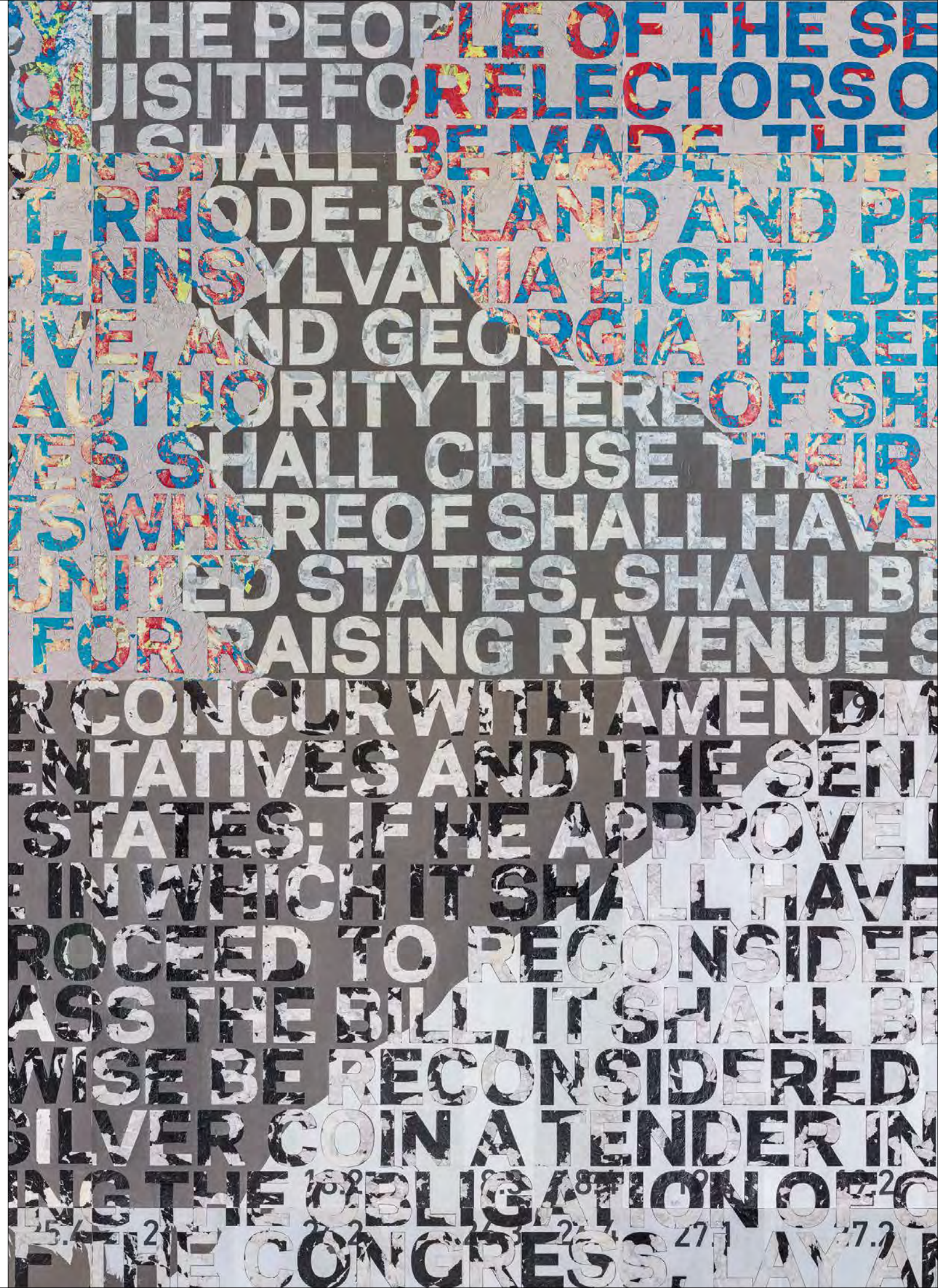
The words that can be seen in *We the People*, all configured in capital letters, are fragments of text taken from the U.S. Constitution—a document first presented by the American government in 1787, which established the country's underlying laws and guaranteed certain fundamental rights for its citizens. Bradford has integrated this historic document within his works since 2013 as part of his ongoing interest in exploring themes relating to freedom, democracy, and power. "When the constitution was written, I [as a Black person] was not part of it, nor were women, or people who didn't own property," Bradford says. "That's why we have amendments. We all have a voice, and we should, when we need to, protest." In this painting, the focal point is the Constitution's Preamble—the section states that the American people ultimately hold the country's political power. As with Bradford's other paintings, the overall aesthetic is abstract: the text varies in legibility, with some parts being unreadable or barely visible. Yet, the opening sentence, which begins in the upper left-hand corner of the canvas, is explicit: "WE THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES..."

Bradford's work at the Embassy is characteristic of his approach to painting, which is based on paper rather than paint. "I use paper because it has such a fragile nature to it, and such a historical quality as well," he says of his signature medium. "It exists between paint and sculpture." In *We the People*, paper has been soaked, crumpled up, and glued down in several layers to create a highly textured, collaged surface—an intricate, process-driven technique that the artist has used throughout his two-decade career. Starting with a base of black, white, and silver sheets, the pigmented areas of the painting that reveal red, blue, and yellow letters are the result of paper that has been oxidized. Bradford's training in the late 1990s at the California Institute of the Arts, a school critical of traditional methods, led him to make paintings from materials found in his local environment in Los Angeles, where the artist grew up. He first incorporated street posters in his work in 2002—hand-made designs that advertised local businesses such as used cars or carnival troupes. These posters were followed by billboards, newsprint, comics, and end papers (a hair-styling aid used in his mother's beauty salon). "I'm always looking for details in the urban environment that point to something that is going on socially," Bradford explains. "Something to do with incarceration, immigration, race, class—but it's a detail, and I always need to abstract it because those are such large words."

*We the People* navigates the essence of American identity, as well as the complexities that are part and parcel of collective objectives. The painting's fleeting quality, where lucid passages of text transition into hazy remnants and vibrant colors become muted, mirrors a document that is living rather than set in stone—a set of principles that can be adapted with each new age. "I'm trying to dismantle it," says Bradford, "it's me trying to grapple with the enormous history that made this country."



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# Jay Heikes

*Quintessence*, 2018

Bronze and quartz

Star 1: 55 in × 93 in (139.7 × 236.2 cm)

Star 2: 68 in × 79 in (172.7 × 200.7 cm)

Star 3: 70 in × 78 in (177.8 × 198.1 cm)

Whether painting, sculpture, installation, or drawing, Jay Heikes's works are determined by their physical qualities as objects—namely the unexpected transformations that can come from combining materials. "I hate saying my studio is like a lab," the New Jersey-born artist has said, "but really, I'm an amateur in a room seeing what materials will do when I ask them to do something they are not meant to do." Heikes experiments with a diverse range of elements, including aluminium, glue, bismuth, copper, leather, steel, salt, and slag. Although unremarkable as individual entities, Heikes's interest in creating hybrid forms, in "doing nature's work in a silly way that is not practiced or refined," is driven by the potential result of something magical.

The notion of alchemy is at the heart of *Quintessence* (2018), Heikes's site-specific outdoor installation. The work consists of three massive star-shaped forms, placed at a distance from each other on the wall framing the Embassy's lawn. Each dense star, flattened yet distinctly sculptural, is cast from bronze merged with quartz crystals. The result is dazzling, crater-like surfaces.

For Heikes, alchemy is as much about conceptual transformation as a physical mutation. His stars, rather than conforming to the commonly seen seven-point form, are fragmentary rather than fully formed. Alluding to the stars in the American flag, Heikes's project is both a memorial to his country and a challenge. His revision of this universally recognized form, in which sections of the star are interrupted or cut off, alludes to the tensions of our current cultural moment, in which a global health crisis has merged with escalating political tensions and race-related uprisings across the world. Heikes is asking, can symbols be altered? Could an imperfect star, reflective of cultural realities, ever represent a nation? As he explains: "My ideas about America relate to not hiding things under the surface, but letting all of the symptoms bubble up. These pitted sores within the stars became really important for me in order to show that maybe the beauty of a kind of 'Americanness' is the fact that things are allowed to bubble up."

## Art in Embassies (AIE)

*Quintessence*, 2018, developed from an earlier work of the same title, made in 2013, which was part of the exhibition *Walkabout* at Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York. How did this work become the starting point for the Embassy commission?

## Jay Heikes (JH)

In 2013 Virginia Shore, then a curator for Art in Embassies, saw *Walkabout* and approached me about proposing a permanent, outdoor sculpture for an American embassy yet to be constructed in London. She was attracted to the organic stars made of wax and aluminium sulfate crystals, known as *Quintessence*. I'm assuming it was because of their associations to the American flag, but I think it went deeper than that because Virginia also saw the connection to a cosmological theme that put humanity in the context of something larger than itself. I had never worked on a project of such permanence, scale, and inevitable planning, so I was immediately intrigued but predicted a steep learning curve.



AIE In its first iteration, the work was placed in an exhibition that centered around alchemy. Magic, or the idea of transformation, has guided your work for some time. How did the commission help to develop this ongoing thread within your practice?

JH Up until that point, I hadn't thought about *Quintessence*, which translates roughly for me into 'a perfect harmony of refined essence,' as something quintessentially American or nationalistic. I was entrenched in a more alchemical process where my focus was how unlikely hybrids could smash together in unexpected ways to create something peculiar—and in this peculiarity existed the ability for hidden themes to reveal themselves. I have always felt this way about materials but had not directly related it to a cultural parallel. But then I realized what I had internally arrived at, as a foundational patriotism, was the idea that imperfection was not only recognized in America but celebrated and even championed. Purity was feeling like a thing of the past, the result of over two centuries living in the 'melting pot'. So, the stars, somewhat pathetic, originally because of their material make-up, were a way to convey the form of how I saw our society enduring.

AIE Which is why the stars you have created are fragmented and uneven. Aside from the specific meaning that you have attributed to these forms, in relation to your feelings about your home country, the star works successfully as something that has multiple associations and is immediately understood.

JH As the proposal progressed, I was guided by these seven-pointed forms, historically used to ward off evil. I had the desire to present something recognized as universal, even if a bit abstracted, that all earthly beings could relate to, Londoners and diplomats, tourists walking along the Thames, and the construction



# I HAD THE DESIRE TO PRESENT SOMETHING RECOGNIZED AS UNIVERSAL THAT ALL EARTHLY BEINGS COULD RELATE TO

crews that would inevitably be everywhere in the quickly changing Battersea neighborhood which would provide the site for the new embassy. And in wanting everyone to see something familiar at first glance, I hoped that familiarity would change over time to something eerily off-kilter, so my focus was both site-specific and psychological from the very beginning. What strikes me about my stars, and what I wanted to convey, was the feeling of imbalance and a kind of organic growth by lopping off some of the limbs of the stars. I don't want to say that my internal mantra is 'imbalance as a means to eternal harmony,' but I do feel that is a valid point of departure in talking about what it means to be American. The euphoria I feel from our country's imperfections is represented in the grizzled, mutated forms of the stars.

**AIE** *Quintessence* is installed outdoors. Knowing that the work would be vulnerable in this way presumably made an impact on what kind of materials you chose to work with?

**JH** The original material inspirations had to go for the sake of permanence in the outdoor elements. I decided on cast bronze to replace the wax and quartz for the crystals.

**AIE** Can you talk about the process relating to the making of the work?

**JH** I worked with my foundry friends Bill and Zach Cole at Anurag Art in Stillwater, Minnesota—a father/son operation so committed to trying new things and allowing me into the process that I have grown accustomed to just being there working alone, as they tend to the animals. I have worked with them for over a decade. Whatever metal I bring to them, they will melt, and



whatever alternative technique I want to try, they are game. So, I knew that with such an ambitious project, they were the team I needed to oversee every detail, which would take some of the stress off communicating what I wanted to a fabricator or someone unfamiliar with my approach. What began as a delusional discussion between the three of us about the possibility of casting bronze around quartz clusters in a lost wax, sand-mold process now seems like a fortuitous moment as I look back at the never-ending trajectory of how to bring the materials of the original sculptures to another context.

AIE Given your close focus on experimenting with materials, did you come up against any technical challenges?

JH Initially, the quartz crystals survived our experiments, and we thought we were geniuses, but over time we realized that the high temperatures of the molten bronze weakened some of the crystal structures of the quartz, and they would become fragile and start to shatter with minimal movement. Luckily, in that moment, we discovered the incredible craters they created as the quartz would explode during the pours. In the end, we went with a medley of quartz crystals that were not compromised, naturally embedded during the casting process, in combination with crystals that were adhered [to] in the craters at the very end of the process with a marine epoxy.

AIE The surface texture of each sculpture revolves around an intense web of patterns that seems to both explode and collapse inwards. Hollowed areas are punctuated by protruding pieces of quartz; miniscule marks appear next to large outlines of circles.

JH The surfaces were worked on for what felt like an eternity and then lacquered as to keep the bronze from oxidizing, although I would welcome that slowly over time. The beautiful thing about bronze is that at some point, you really start to feel like it is giving in to your will, and you are sculpting it like butter. It may have been cast to begin with, but that is a tiny step in bringing the texture, form, and patina to life within the sculptures.





## Jenny Holzer

*The Waging of Peace, 2018*  
Engraved Cornish granite

Words are essential in the work of American artist Jenny Holzer. As a pioneer of text-based art, she has spent the last four decades crafting language into visual spectacle. The sentences that form her installations, a mix of poetry and polemic, invariably appear as bold capital letters, bringing with them a sense of urgency.

Holzer has always used text to engage with the politics of everyday life, reflecting on the various points of view at play in society. She presents propositions (Raise boys and girls the same way) and convictions (Solitude is enriching; action causes more trouble than thought) alongside observations (Shot dead at school). Although the artist explores numerous subjects, confronting injustice has nonetheless been of paramount importance for her. “We don’t need to work on joy—that is something that takes care of itself and is sustaining,” she says, “but one must argue with cruelty, homicide—abuse of any sort.”

The artist’s messages have always been intended for the wider world. They have been projected onto major public buildings, such as Rockefeller Center and the Louvre Pyramid, and transmitted through electronic signs, including giant billboards in Times Square. Her writings have also been carved into stone benches, cast as bronze plaques, and placed on cinema marquees. In her first significant project, *Truisms* (1977–79), she printed provocative statements on posters and pasted them around Manhattan. “I wanted to offer content that people—not necessarily art people—could understand,” Holzer explains. “I was concentrating almost exclusively on how to present artwork to a general public.” Since that groundbreaking series, the artist has continually encouraged us to question





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ARCHITECTURE**

# THE QUEEN TALKING ABOUT THE DIFFICULTY OF MAKING PEACE—WHAT COULD BE FINER?

*The Waging of Peace, 2018*  
Engraved Cornish granite

“the usual baloney” that infiltrates our daily lives. As she says, “I like placing content wherever people look.”

Since 2001, Holzer has used the words of other authors, often working with poets. “When I use texts by others,” she says, “I can go straight to the fun.” For her U.S. Embassy commission, Holzer broadened her pool of collaborators by inviting the general public to contribute suggestions, in the spirit of cultural exchange. *The Waging of Peace* consists of three texts that have been inscribed into stone walls. The texts are quotes by well-known figures: writer Ralph Waldo Emerson, United States senator and presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy, and Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom. Holzer’s call for proposals requested lively and memorable texts that resonated with British-American relations, and she was especially keen to engage with high school and university students in the United Kingdom and the United States. “Woe betide,” she says, “when the young give up.” The three chosen texts came from one student, one interested citizen, and one U.S. Embassy employee. “I very much enjoy and benefit from working collaboratively,” Holzer comments, “and we found gold nuggets in the submissions.”

The quotes by Emerson and Queen Elizabeth II appear outdoors, on walls surrounding the Embassy’s lawn. The oldest of the three, Emerson’s quote is taken from his *Essays* of 1850: The only way to have a friend is to be one. The quote from the Queen, included in her address to the United Nations General Assembly in 2010, reads: It has perhaps always been the case that the waging of peace is the hardest form of leadership of all. “Emerson on friendship had the essentials and seemed to represent diplomacy at its



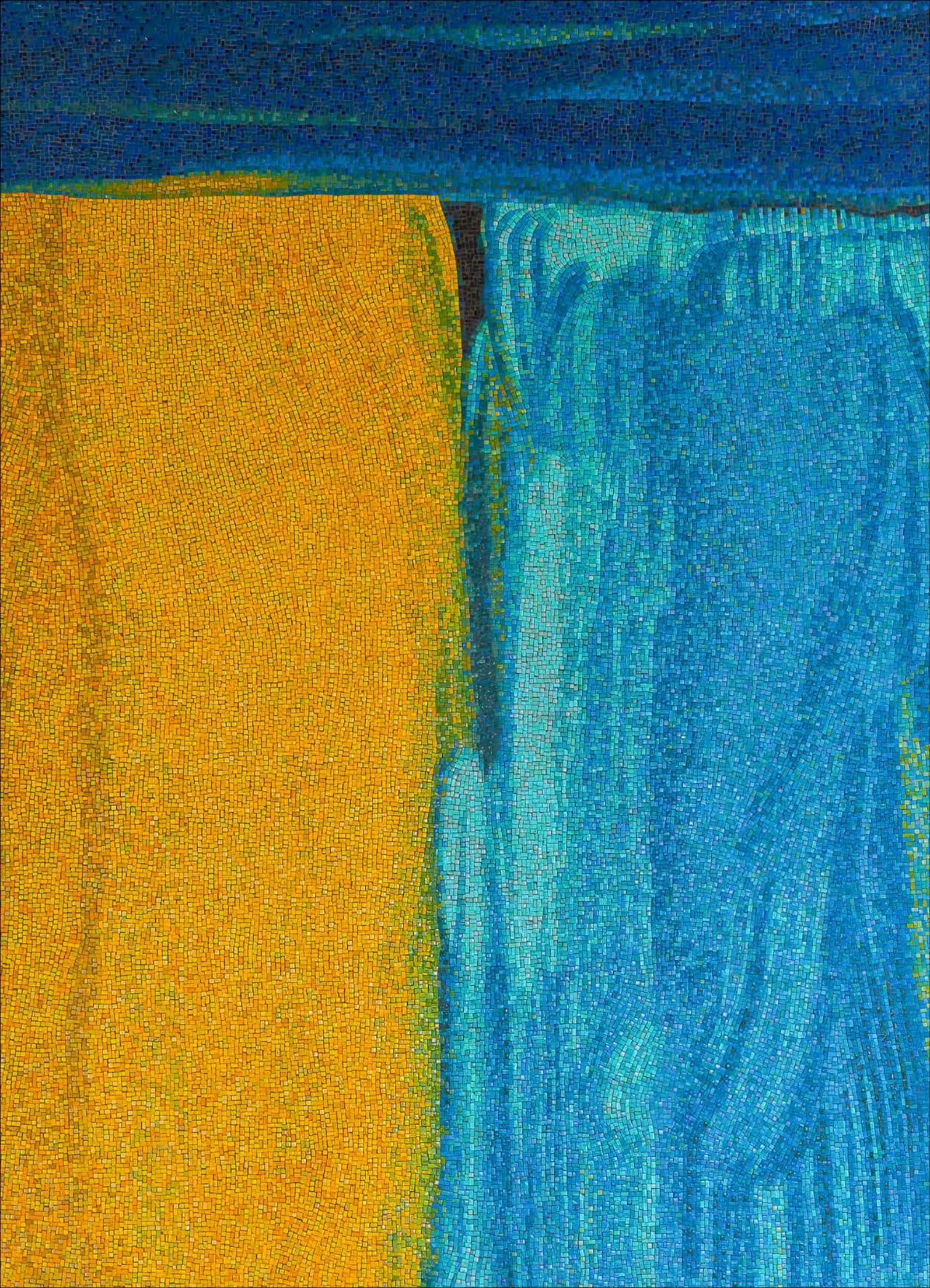
EACH TIME A MAN STANDS UP FOR AN IDEAL, OR ACTS TO IMPROVE THE LOT OF OTHERS,  
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CROSSING EACH OTHER FROM A MILLION DIFFERENT CENTERS OF ENERGY AND DARING  
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OF OPPRESSION AND RESISTANCE.

ROBERT F. KENNEDY

*The Waging of Peace, 2018*  
Engraved Cornish granite

best," Holzer comments. "The Queen talking about the difficulty of making peace—what could be finer?" The quote by Kennedy is seen when entering the Embassy and originates from his Day of Affirmation speech at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, in 1966: Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance. "Kennedy represented idealism and pragmatism," says Holzer. "Not only idealism, but routine hard work towards preventing what is dangerous and cruel."

As with many of her other projects, *The Waging of Peace* allowed Holzer to create an artwork for a designated public space that receives large numbers of people. "It was as good as ever to be able to go on site and to pace around to see what sang," she says. Having spent her career working closely with prominent buildings, the artist has contemplated that "sometimes it's interesting to either melt or join architecture." While Holzer's light projections are temporary, her stone carvings exemplify her desire to make objects that could last indefinitely. "Much of my work is fugitive—it's there and gone entirely, somewhere along the line," Holzer explains. "I appreciate the dignity and permanence of text and stone—always have, since I was a little kid. That thought recurred with this project—working with an Embassy and working with the weighty content of the text selected."



# Sean Scully

*Golden Frieze*, 2017–2018

Mosaic

Each panel: 17 ft × 9 ft, 153 ft<sup>2</sup>  
(5.18 m × 2.74 m, 14.21 m<sup>2</sup>)

Overall: 17 ft × 104.333333 ft, 1,773.67 ft<sup>2</sup>  
(5.18 m × 31.8 m, 164.8 m<sup>2</sup>)

Sean Scully has spent almost five decades making abstract paintings that explore color, texture, and light. The Irish-born artist's vast canvases depict simple geometric shapes, such as stripes and squares, that have been organized into various configurations. Evoking landscapes, horizon lines, and architecture, these vivid compositions are often informed by personal experiences, such as the artist's travels. In their use of precise, grid-like structures, Scully's works offer a sense of balance and compression; yet, the overall image is fleeting and hazy, rather than fixed, owing to the artist's vibrant brushstrokes, which blur the boundaries between forms. "In my work," Scully says, "structure and emotion rage simultaneously."

The artist's sculptural installation at the U.S. Embassy is based on one of his paintings. *Golden Frieze* encompasses nine variations of the same picture, which have been arranged in a linear sequence. Constructed from painted glass pieces, the work takes the form of a mosaic. Similar to a mural, *Golden Frieze* occupies a 153-foot-long-wall on the south-facing side of the building and displays a pattern of interwoven squares and rectangles in red, orange, yellow, green, and blue. The work was inspired by a trip Scully made to Ravenna, Italy, some two decades ago, where he visited the city's Byzantine mosaics. "They are the most celebrated examples of this glittering art form in the world," he explains. "It always stayed in my mind. And I was thinking that perhaps, one day, I could unlock its potential in the twenty-first century." As with his paintings, Scully's mosaic considers the powerful physical presence that can be relayed through an artwork.

Art in Embassies (AIE)

How does making an outdoor sculpture compare with painting?

Sean Scully (SS)

I have spent my whole life making paintings which have to be looked after and kept in museum conditions. When you make something outside, you are relieved of all that responsibility, and it's quite wonderful. You have this relationship with the air and the light. London has a lot of weather—it's very humid, especially down by the river. I thought it was interesting to make something that people could touch—and they will touch it. They will run their hands along it, as they should, of course. There's a very beautiful relationship between the image and the material itself and the way it all interacts with that wonderful English weather that I grew up in.

AIE *Golden Frieze* takes one of your paintings as its starting point. How did you develop this idea?

SS What I wanted to do is to repeat the image so that as you travel along the wall, you're looking at nine variations of it—each one is presenting itself slightly differently. It's like passing a billboard on the highway—you get all of these beautiful compositions being made as you look out the window. I was thinking about travel—about trains and cars. Travel is something I do quite a lot of in Europe, but not so much in America where I mainly go between my studio and my house, which is just two miles.



THERE'S A VERY BEAUTIFUL  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
THE IMAGE AND THE  
MATERIAL ITSELF AND THE  
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ENGLISH WEATHER

AIE What about the technical process?

SS I stretched the painting on the computer and repeated it nine times, cheek by jowl. Then it was only a question of choosing the colors, which was a wonderful, wonderful experience. What I wanted to do was make colors that were reminiscent of nature, in some way, that were "outside colors"—colors that you see in gardens and flowers and in the sky, and so on. I didn't want to make it depressing, like one of my elegiac paintings. I wanted to make something that was uplifting, and that would play with the light in the air.

AIE Although you have used a variety of media, including printmaking and sculpture, painting has been at the center of your practice. Were you always interested in creating abstract images?

SS When I first went to art school, I was a figure painter, a figure drawer, and I spent hours making portraits of friends. I had a wonderful teacher at Croydon College of Art [1965-1968] called Barry Hurst—an extraordinary guy. He taught me a lot and helped me to look at the German expressionists. I was making abstract paintings by the time I left Croydon and went to Newcastle University [1968-1972]. Everybody up there was a conceptual artist in the shadow of Richard Hamilton, who taught there. So, I had to, in a sense, intellectualize my painting in order to survive socially. I had to structure it, to rationalize it. Otherwise, I would have been dead. That is when my painting became more systematic.

AIE While you were an undergraduate at Newcastle, you took a trip to Morocco, in 1967, which had a profound effect on your work.

SS I encountered the carpet auctions in fairs, the *jallabas* that people wear, the looms that you see being dried outside, the brass bowls—you see them tapping them out like Zen masters. It was extraordinary. You see all of this repetition. It affected me greatly. When I returned to Newcastle, I painted stripes. That was it.

AIE Throughout your career, you have been focused on this interaction between materiality and color. In *Golden Frieze*, these qualities are perhaps exaggerated due to the outdoor setting.

SS I made an image that could compete with and use its context interactively. As one walks along the passageway, the image should transform and renew itself through color—and how that color mixes with the light of London. I have always made a very big push for the sensuality and the physicality of the surface. This is very important to me. My work has such a physical character to it.

AIE It's interesting that you mention this because the works you made at the beginning of your career focused quite heavily on sculpture—on the three-dimensional. For your graduation exhibition at Newcastle, you showed sculptures, and during



your fellowship at Harvard University [1972–1973] you made objects using felt, which made reference to weaving techniques. Where did your interest in making things come from?

**SS** When I started making abstract work, the experience of my childhood became very powerful. My mother taught me to knit, and I used to darn socks because in those days we had woolen socks. That was my job. I used to go to a wool shop on Sydenham High Street that was literally two minutes from my house. All the spools of wool would be on the shelves, and I just thought it was extraordinary. I used to go around to look at all the different colors.

**AIE** How old were you?

**SS** I was eight or nine. My father was a great barber; he was ranked number four in the country, and my mother was a great knitter. So, the relationship with craft—it was very powerful right from the get-go. I was a member of the working classes, but I had artistic pretensions. All of my content comes from having grown up in London, which I must say was a fantastic place to grow up.

**AIE** You left school at the age of fifteen to work as a printer. How did that inform you?

**SS** I became a typesetter, which is another obsessive physical job. What you're doing with typesetting is making a sculpture into an image because each letter is a little tower with a letter on the top, and they're all made from lead. All of those things that I did in my early work, when I was at art school, which you mentioned—the extreme linearity of those works is related to my experiences of working in the factory. It's extraordinarily labor-intensive. It marked me deeply.

**AIE** The seamless quality in your paintings, where all of the forms are joined together, underlines their geometry. *Golden Frieze* creates a very different effect because of the spacing that is clearly visible between each of the glass components in the mosaic.

**SS** It makes the animation in the piece. There's a lot of rhythm in my work.

**AIE** And the work's title, *Golden Frieze*, draws on your interest to create movement, in this case through light.

**SS** I wanted it to be very light-reflective so that it wasn't just a thing on the wall, but something that is kinetic and involved with the natural environment it is placed in. There is this very beautiful light that you get in London, particularly at the end of the day in the afternoon, so I've made something that cheers people up if they have to queue outside.



# Barbara Walker

*The Form of Her I*, 2019  
Charcoal and Conté on paper  
72 in × 48 in (182.88 cm × 121.92 cm)

*The Form of Her* is a series of two black-and-white portraits by British artist Barbara Walker. Rendered from charcoal and crayon, these atmospheric drawings depict residents of Vauxhall, a South London neighborhood close to the U.S. Embassy. One composition is of Emmanella, age 11; the other is of Rita, age 70. By documenting a young girl and a woman at distinctly different stages in their lives, the works reflect Walker's interest in engaging with local communities and highlighting the experiences of individuals. In *The Form of Her*, the artist specifically contemplates how her subjects' senses of self are shaped by something they own. Walker asked her sitters to think about a possession that was especially meaningful to them, which they would want to include within the drawing. Emmanella holds a delicate beaded necklace in one hand, echoing the simplicity of her plain white dress, while Rita wears an embellished tiara that complements the other eye-catching jewelry adorning her body. Both figures stand, with their quietly imposing bodies dominating the pictures. Drawing attention to the relationship between physical attributes and social status, as well as the cultural assumptions that are provoked by a person's outward appearance, these works are part of Walker's ongoing project to give visibility to often under-recognized and misrepresented communities within the United Kingdom, namely those belonging to the Black diaspora. "I like to think that these new works will add to the current conversation regarding the depiction of the Black body," Walker says. "By sitting outside of preconceived notions, these drawings will act as a catalyst for the audience to continue the conversation."

Walker's own experiences as a Black woman growing up in the racially divided city of Birmingham in the 1970s and 1980s guided her objectives as an artist. "I grew up during the rise of the National Front, when [Conservative politician] Enoch Powell was spouting his rhetoric," she explained in her profile piece for the *Guardian*. Inspired by the local, West Midlands-based BLK Art Group, which included important Black artists such as Sonia Boyce and Claudette Johnson, Walker knew that her practice would need to explore race within contemporary British culture at large. As she has commented, "I can't be producing nonsensical topics when Black men are dying in police custody. I'm interpreting the world around me and pushing against the grain." Since graduating with a bachelor's degree in art and design from the University of Birmingham in the mid-1990s, Walker's meticulous depictions of the human figure have navigated a variety of issues, including the contributions of West Indian soldiers to the British Armed Forces, the impact of the police force's 'stop and search' policy on black and brown bodies, and the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on frontline NHS staff.

Having functioned as Walker's primary medium since the beginning of her career, the act of drawing is not only a means for creating work but also a way to connect deeply with the communities that inform the artist's projects. To draw is "an intimate act. It's a trinity: me, the surface, and the sitter." *The Form of Her* series began with the artist meeting with potential subjects, after which Emmanella and Rita were selected. Walker carried out preparatory sketches of the pair, with the intention of "capturing an essence







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*The Form of Her II, 2019*  
Charcoal and Conté on paper  
84 in x 48 in (213.36 cm x 121.92 cm)

of their personalities,” before working solely from photographs. Personal anecdotes shared between Walker and her sitters during these initial stages also determined how each portrait developed.

With specificity forming the basis of her work, Walker’s commitment to the individuality of her subjects nevertheless makes her contemporary narratives universal. While the artist describes *The Form of Her* as “a way to chronicle a moment in time,” her multigenerational portraits are ultimately calls for more open and nuanced responses when it comes to how we look at others.



# Rachel Whiteread

*U.S. Embassy (Flat pack house), 2013–2015*

Cast concrete

Inside section:

H: 252.8 in (642 cm), W: 590.6 in (1,500 cm)

Space between the inside and outside sections:

W: 27.6 in (70 cm)

Outside section:

H: 252.8 in (642 cm), W: 417.3 in (1,060 cm)

Overall:

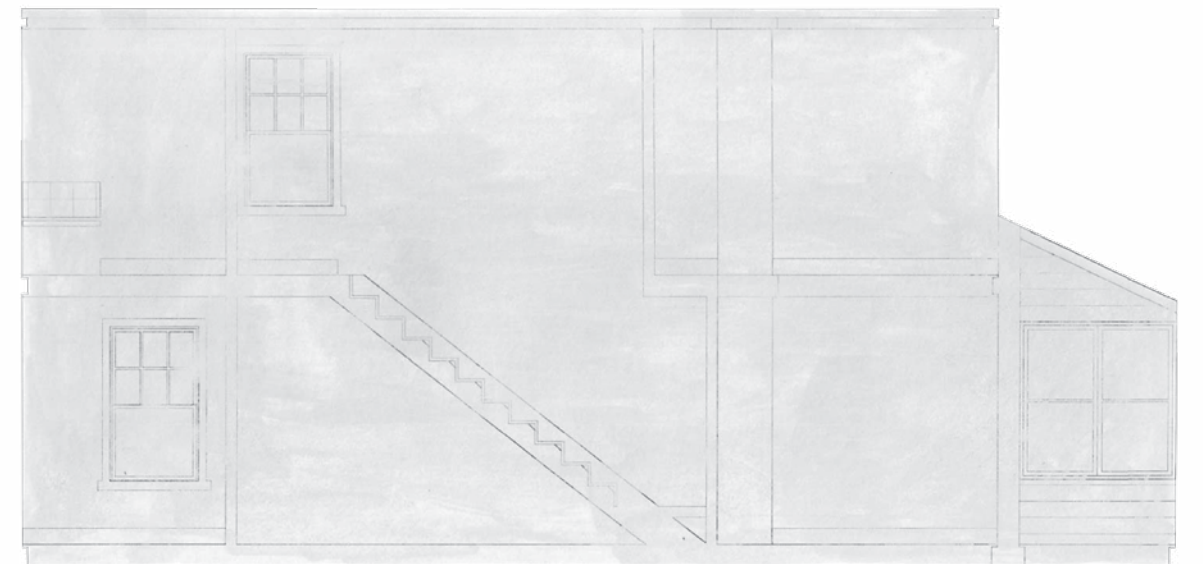
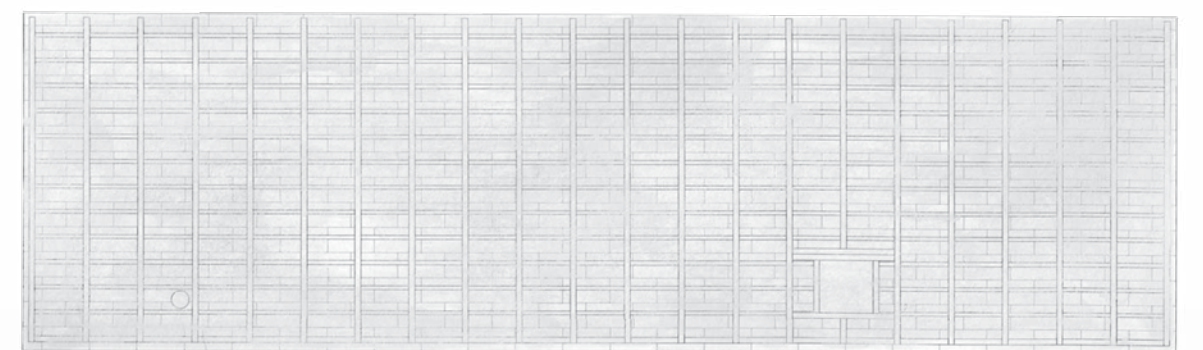
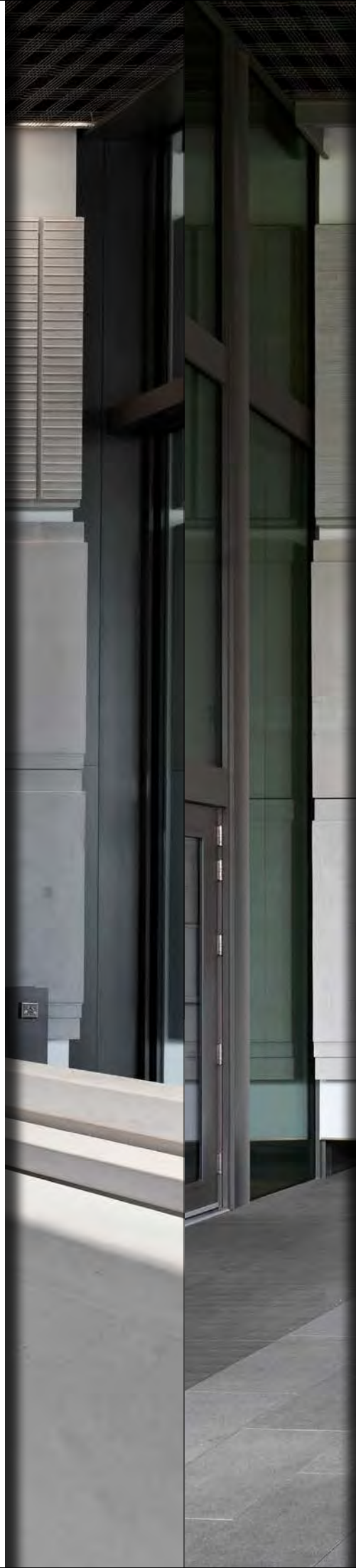
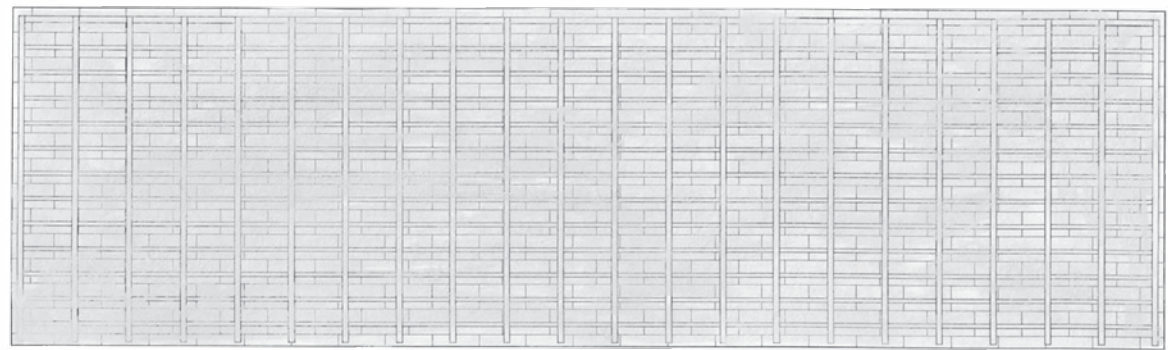
H: 252.8 in (642 cm), W: 1035.4 in (2,630 cm)

Consisting of thirty-one individual components, *U.S. Embassy (Flat pack house)* replicates a two-story prefabricated house. The outlines of staircases, windows, and tiles, as well as doors and electrical outlets, appear as pale grey concrete casts that take the form of huge rectangular panels. Mounted in a vertical sequence across the Embassy's walls, with the roof appearing first and the front door positioned last, these monumental concrete slabs occupy the full height and length of the building. In this site-specific sculpture by British artist Rachel Whiteread, it is the empty interior spaces of the house that have been preserved, rather than its external structure. Functioning as an imprint of the building, the work reveals the contours of the house's various architectural features. This inverted process of casting, in which air and space are transformed into something solid, has been fundamental to Whiteread's practice since her earliest sculptures, which date from the 1990s. Using materials such as resin, rubber, concrete, and bronze, her handling of negative space both memorializes and reincarnates what is missing, resulting in sculptures that resemble ghostly replicas. Other than houses, objects Whiteread has cast include chairs, mattresses, bookshelves, and boxes, with domestic life serving as an important source.

The artist's interest in habitual spaces led her to the history of prefabricated housing at the beginning of the twentieth century. "I started looking into the origins of flat-pack houses and started to see these architectural patterns," the artist explains. The patterns Whiteread used refer to the numerous models of homes advertised to aspiring homebuyers through extensive catalogs during this time. The house that was eventually devised by the artist resulted from original architectural plans; only the dimensions were amended to fit the specifications of the Embassy building.

The symbolic presence of *U.S. Embassy (Flat pack house)* appeals to its location—a building that revolves around the notion of being far away from home. When making the work, Whiteread was just as aware of those moving to America in search of a better life as she was of Americans grappling with a changing nation in the aftermath of World War II. The complexities attached to what Whiteread describes as "this sort of grand promise of a new life" form the basis of the work.

Whiteread first came to public attention with *House* (1993), a life-sized replica of the interior of a terraced house in London's East End, which involved filling the building with liquid concrete and then stripping off the exterior—the house itself—so that only the impression of its innards remained. Whiteread received a master's degree in sculpture from the University College London Slade School of Art in 1987, although she first experimented with casting while studying for a degree in painting at Brighton Polytechnic in England. Seeking "a way of making things more alive," Whiteread took a class taught by sculptor Richard Wilson. "I got a spoon and pressed it into some sand. Then I pulled it out and poured metal into that area and sort of made a spoon. But it had lost its spoonness," she explains. "That was the first thing I made that made me think about how you could simply change the nature of an object by just doing this simple process. It really started from there." Having spent the last four decades exploring the relationship





I WANTED THE WORK TO BE SOMETHING THAT WAS A PICTURE—SOMETHING THAT YOU LOOKED AT. MAYBE YOU ARE LEANING UP AGAINST IT WHILE YOU'RE WAITING FOR YOUR VISA AND BORED IN A QUEUE, AND THEN GRADUALLY YOU TAKE IT ALL IN AND REALIZE WHAT IT IS, AND AS YOU WALK THROUGH THE BUILDING, YOU SEE THE REST OF THE SCULPTURE, AND IT BECOMES CLEAR.

between human presence and objects, Whiteread is keen for her works to infiltrate the spaces they inhabit—albeit discreetly. “I wanted to make something that was very quiet,” she says of her Embassy commission. “I think that’s an important way of looking at it.”

Art in Embassies (AIE)

*U.S. Embassy (Flat pack house)* is experienced in two parts: the concrete panels are first seen outdoors, under the building’s consular entrance, and then, following a glass wall, they continue inside, where visitors to the building are greeted. Where did this idea come from, of having the work split in this way?

Rachel Whiteread (RW)

I was asked if I wanted to make something for the wall which leads into the processing area of the Embassy. I was really happy to be around the back of the building—thousands of people use that entrance/exit every day. I liked the idea of using the inside and the outside and somehow repeating the images. I was thinking of wall drawings, of reliefs that go on walls. And obviously my oeuvre is casting. So, I was trying to think of something that would work between the two.

AIE Had prefabricated housing always been of interest to you?

RW Whenever I make these sorts of larger works, I have something very particular in mind. I won’t say, I’ve got these six ideas, which one should we do? When I was making *Water Tower* (the first public sculpture that Whiteread conceived and displayed in the United States, originally installed in 1998 on a rooftop in Manhattan), I spent a lot of time looking around, trying to find something to cast. I was trying to think about the history of America, and the history of building and furniture, and all sorts of things. For the Embassy, it occurred to me that here was a great way to bring these things together. In the 1950s, or a bit earlier than that, there was a real renaissance in house-building in America—houses built from these kits. You would buy a kit from a catalog and then put up these very simple timber houses. I was also thinking about people moving to America during this period from the UK, from Ireland, from Europe. What might they have done when they first got there? So labor and travel were also part of it.

AIE Did you consult these original catalogs when figuring out the technical details of the project?

RW I had a number of books that I researched, looking into the origin of flat-pack houses. I used original plans from a building, drawing it all out and working out how many elements the house could be broken up into. To make it fit on the wall, we had to shrink the original plan by 10% or 15%, which isn’t really that noticeable—when you’re standing in front of it, it does feel big and looming.



AIE Your sculptures often examine domestic spaces where people live or pass through. In this work, you are starting with a house that hasn't yet been built, let alone been occupied.

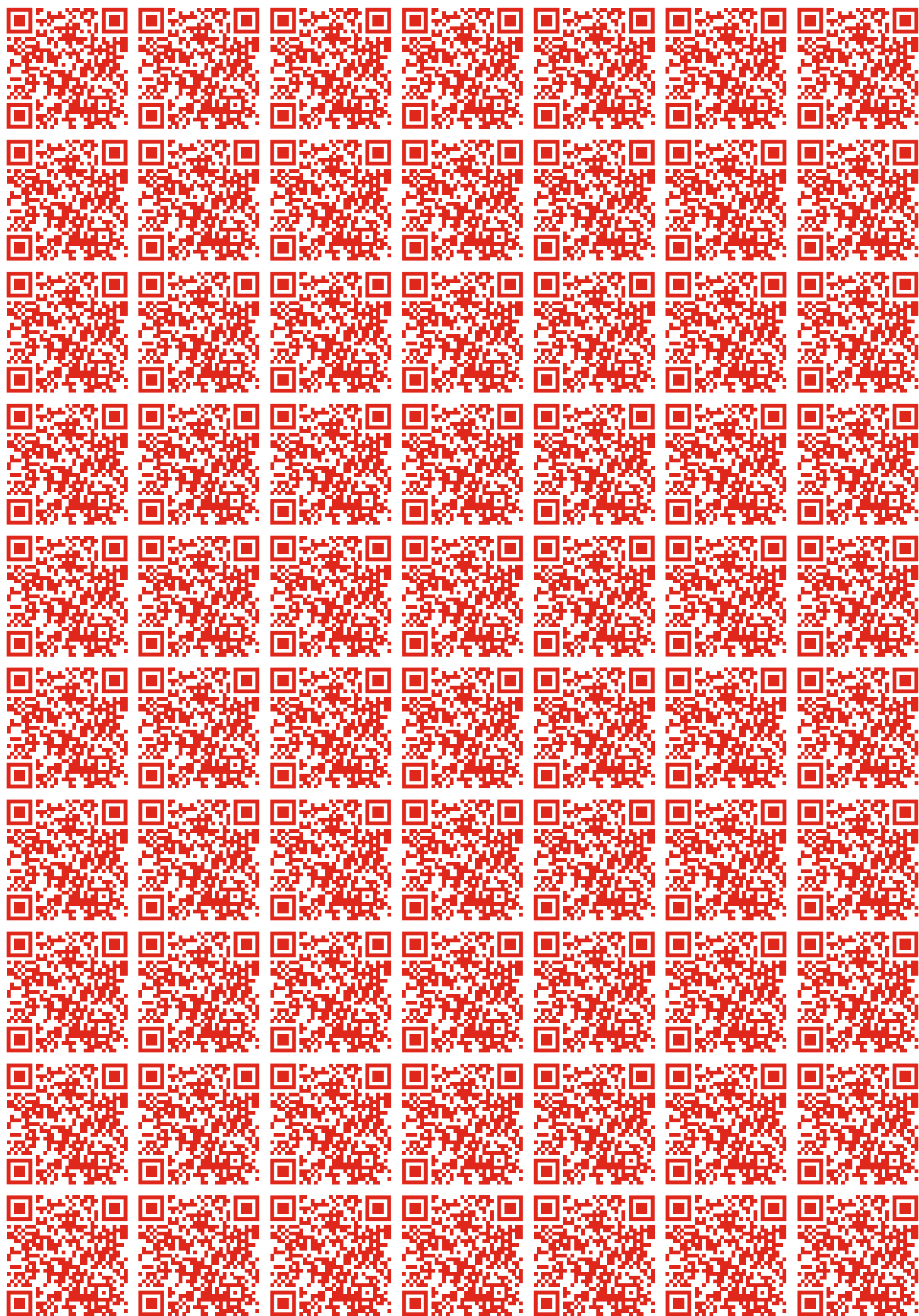
RW Well, obviously, by not having that, you're immediately one step removed from it. You're not involved with it in the same way. I wanted the work to be something that was a picture—something that you looked at. Maybe you are leaning up against it whilst you're waiting for your visa and bored in a queue, and then gradually you take it all in and realize what it is, and as you walk through the building, you see the rest of the sculpture, and it becomes clear.

AIE It's interesting that you relate the work to a picture, as drawing has always been a really important part of your practice an exhibition of Whiteread's drawings was presented at Tate Britain, London, in 2010.

RW It was a way of being able to make a drawing in concrete. I hope that for a lot of the time, the work is just part of the structure of the building. What I like about art is when it sort of creeps up on you.

AIE How would you relate *U.S. Embassy (Flat pack house)* to other casts you have made of buildings, such as *House (1993)*, *The Gran Boathouse (2010)*, *Cabin (2016)* or *Chicken Shed (2017)*?

RW When I make something, I kind of make it for myself. I wanted this work to obviously feel like something of mine: it is a house that has been laid out and has an undulating surface with a lot of detail on it. When I made *House* in 1993, I worked on every inch of the inside of the building. I had a very intimate relationship with it; I knew the family that had lived there. This project was very, very different. I worked on one panel at a time, for instance, and the way it is displayed is obviously very different. But, as you develop as an artist, you make a language, and so I couldn't have made this work for the Embassy without having made *House*.



# Ryan and Hays Holladay

Site: *Wandsworth*, 2018  
Soundwork (iOS and Android app)  
19.07 minutes long

Site: *Wandsworth* is a sound installation by American artists, brothers Ryan and Hays Holladay. Created in response to the U.S. Embassy at Nine Elms, specifically the grounds surrounding the building, the work was commissioned to mark the opening of the site in 2018. The piece consists of a number of musical components but is based around a cyclical piano arrangement that has been layered with various synthesized sounds. Only available through a downloaded mobile app, the work becomes active by the user's movements as tracked by their device's GPS. As they pass through designated areas outside of the Embassy, the score unfolds, with the pace and volume of melodies and rhythms altering depending on how close the user is to certain landmarks. Rather than listening to a predetermined soundtrack, the sequence of music is consequently controlled by the user's chosen route.

Site: *Wandsworth* is one of several location-aware projects developed by the Holladays over the past decade that explore the intersection between physical space, sound, and technology. In these multimedia works, the Holladays digitally tag hundreds of overlapping areas within a landscape, then sync them to musical segments within an app. Although experiential, these projects are not intended to augment reality, operating without any direct input from the user. Instead, they seek to challenge existing perceptions and encourage discovery. "It's exciting to change people's ideas about how music can be experienced," Ryan Holladay says, "and give people the opportunity to see the places they know in a new way."

Trained as musicians, and founders of the band Bluebrain, the Washington D.C.-based brothers produced their first site-specific soundscape in 2011. Defined by the Holladays as the first location-aware album, *The National Mall* app traced the expansive green space between the Lincoln Memorial and Capitol building in the artists' hometown. Describing the project, Ryan Holladay explains: "Approach a lake, and a piano piece changes into a harp. Or, as you get close to the children's merry-go-round, the wooden horses come to life, and you hear sounds of real horses getting steadily louder based on your proximity." The duo's second mobile app, which explored New York City's Central Park, contained more than 400 musical components, each tied to its own location. In collaboration with Stanford University's Experimental Media Art Department, the Holladays engaged in a long-term project that sonically mapped the entirety of the Pacific Coast Highway, a major route in California that covers over 650 miles.

The artists' innovative approach of integrating GPS with music distinguishes their work within the context of new media art. For the Holladays, though, this is just the beginning of their larger pursuit to reimagine how sound can be experienced. "What we're doing is really just one idea," Ryan says. "But it speaks to a larger vision for the music industry...that they begin to see these new technologies not simply as ways of adding bells and whistles to an existing model, but to dream up entirely new ways for people to interact with and experience music."





*Tower Bridge, London, 2015*  
Platinum-Palladium prints on Fabriano Artistico  
E.W.S 300 gsm paper  
Unframed: 24 3/16 in x 30 1/8 in (61.5 cm x 76.5 cm)



*London Eye, London, 2015*  
Platinum-Palladium prints on Fabriano Artistico  
E.W.S 300 gsm paper  
Unframed: 24 3/16 in x 30 1/8 in (61.5 cm x 76.5 cm)

## Idris Khan

London is a series of five photographic prints by British artist Idris Khan. Each black-and-white image depicts an architectural site in the city that is both a major landmark and a popular destination for tourists. The series portrays Buckingham Palace, the London Eye, St. Paul's Cathedral, Tower Bridge, and the Houses of Parliament—places that are intrinsic to the social and physical landscape of the capital. Intensely tonal and atmospheric, the monumental structures appear hazy and precise at once, more akin to a charcoal drawing than a digital print. The *London* series reflects on the emotional impact of cityscapes on our psyches and is characteristic of Khan's interest in using photography as a way to compress time, history, and memory into a single image. The prints were initially published in the *New York Times Magazine*, which had commissioned Khan to create artworks for a special issue marking the London 2012 Summer Olympics.

Khan's objectives as an artist were shaped early on as a student of photography, initially at the University of Derby, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree, and later at the Royal College of Art, London, where he earned a Master of Fine Arts degree. Rather than using photographs to record reality, the medium became a tool for him to grapple with how we accumulate experience. Heavily



Buckingham Palace, London, 2015  
Platinum-Palladium prints on Fabriano Artistico  
E.W.S 300 gsm paper  
Unframed: 24 3/16 in x 30 1/8 in (61.5 cm x 76.5 cm)



St. Paul's, London, 2015  
Platinum-Palladium prints on Fabriano Artistico  
E.W.S 300 gsm paper  
Unframed: 24 3/16 in x 30 1/8 in (61.5 cm x 76.5 cm)

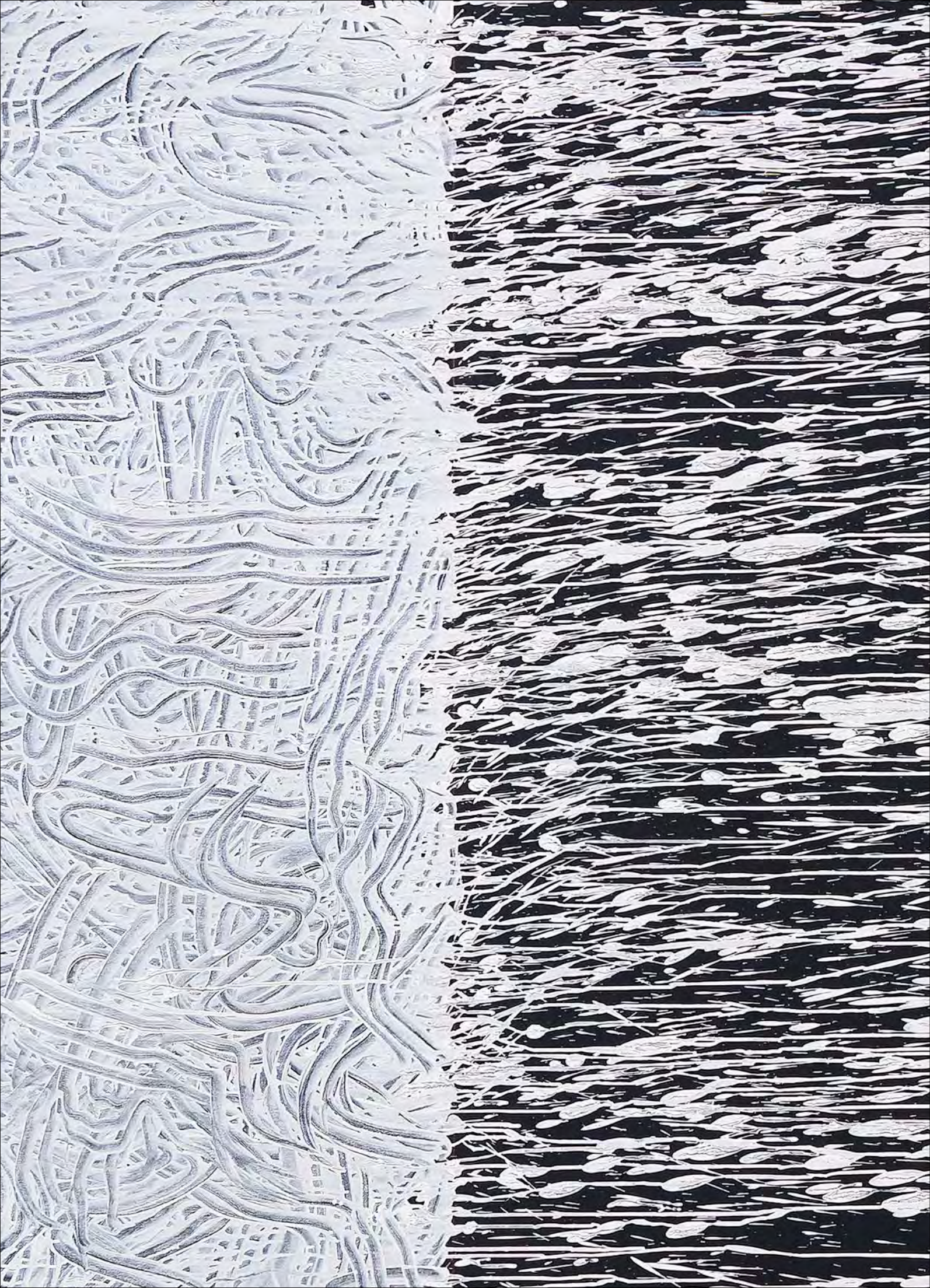
influenced by literature and music, Khan's earlier works included photographs of books that inspired him, such as Susan Sontag's *On Photography* and Sigmund Freud's *Uncanny*, or full musical scores by Mozart and Beethoven, which he would then digitally condense to form one picture. "Can I capture what it would be like to take in that entire piece of knowledge?" Khan asks. "For me, it became about generating a vibration in the image that holds the weight of the cultural impact of the book or the music." As with the *London* series, which offers a distillation of our interactions with specific environments, these other projects question what it might be like to read each page of a book simultaneously or hear every note of a piano concerto in an instance. "A photograph can point to something, but what I am trying to look at is a totality, and what that totality can bring. The many, many, many traces of time built up to create one thing," Khan says. The artist's established method of layering several photographs together in order to construct an image mirrors this desire to allude to the stratified nature of how we experience and remember the world around us. "It is a feeling of stretched time," Khan comments. "[In the *London* series] I try to capture the essence of the building—something that has been permanently imprinted in someone's mind."

WHEN I MOVED TO LONDON—THERE ARE JUST SO MANY IMAGES COMING AT YOU ALL THE TIME, ON THE TUBE, ON THE STREET I WANTED TO STOP TAKING PICTURES AND ALMOST RECYCLE PHOTOGRAPHY WITH THE RISE OF DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY, I WANTED TO MAKE A COMMENT ON THE FACT THAT WE CAN LOOK BACK



*The Houses of Parliament, London, 2015*  
Platinum-Palladium prints on Fabriano Artístico  
E.W.S 300 gsm paper  
Unframed: 24 3/16 in x 30 1/8 in (61.5 cm x 76.5 cm)

The artist's starting point for the series was an extensive selection of postcards that portrayed each of the iconic structures. "I went to all the horrible tourist shops in London to get every postcard I could find," he said. He then photographed segments from each postcard to assemble the final composition. Each of the five prints is constructed from seventy to 100 layers of digital photographs. Khan's decision to work from existing images, rather than visit and photograph each site in person, is indicative of his interest in extracting from historical sources—and underlines his ambivalence towards the role of photography in contemporary life. "When I moved to London—there are just so many images coming at you all the time, on the tube, on the street," Khan states. "I wanted to stop taking pictures and almost recycle photography. With the rise of digital photography, I wanted to make a comment on the fact that we can look back." The dense, painterly quality of Khan's work echoes the artist's desire to consider a slower way of reading images in the age of technology. As the *London* series suggests, architecture becomes less about a physical site, and more about an enduring presence conveyed through a series of marks. "I like to think that when people look at my works, they no longer think about what is seemingly photographed, but look at the surface of the image."



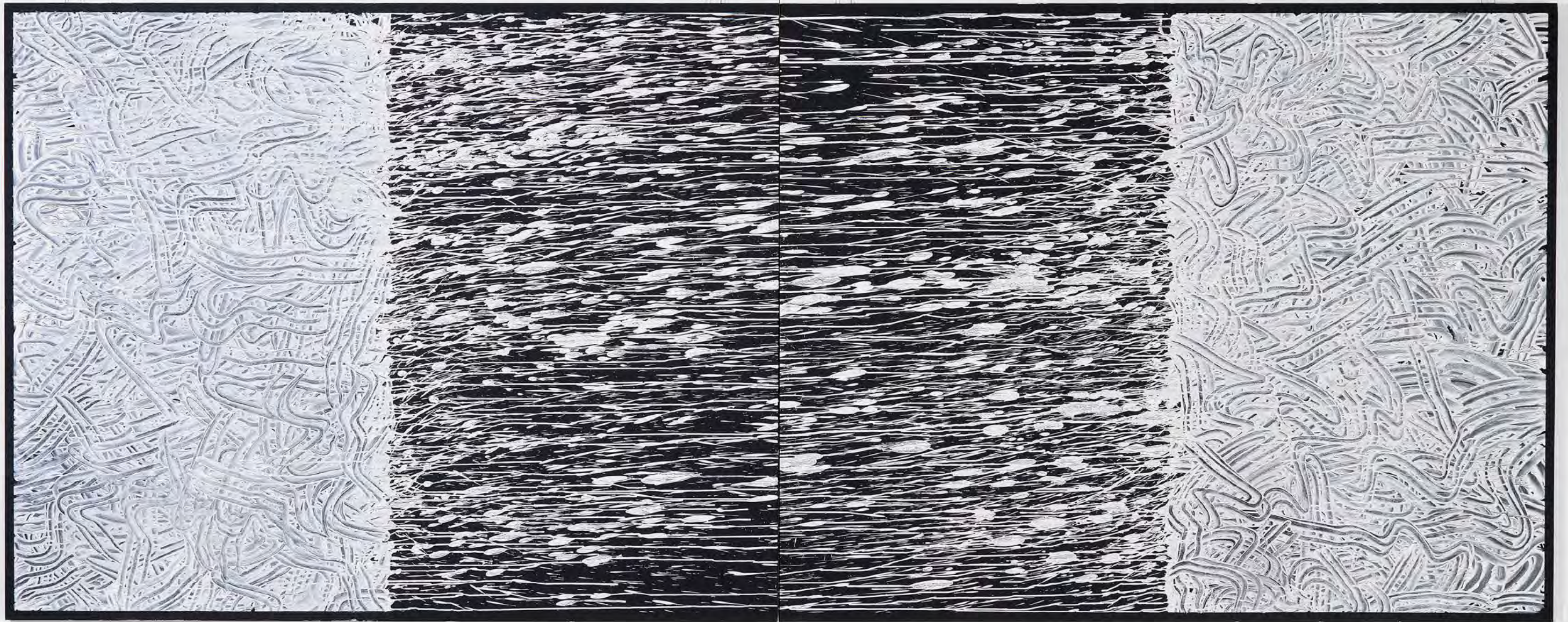
# Richard Long

*Untitled, 2019*  
China clay on wood board  
5 1/4 ft x 13 1/8 ft (1.6 m x 4 m)

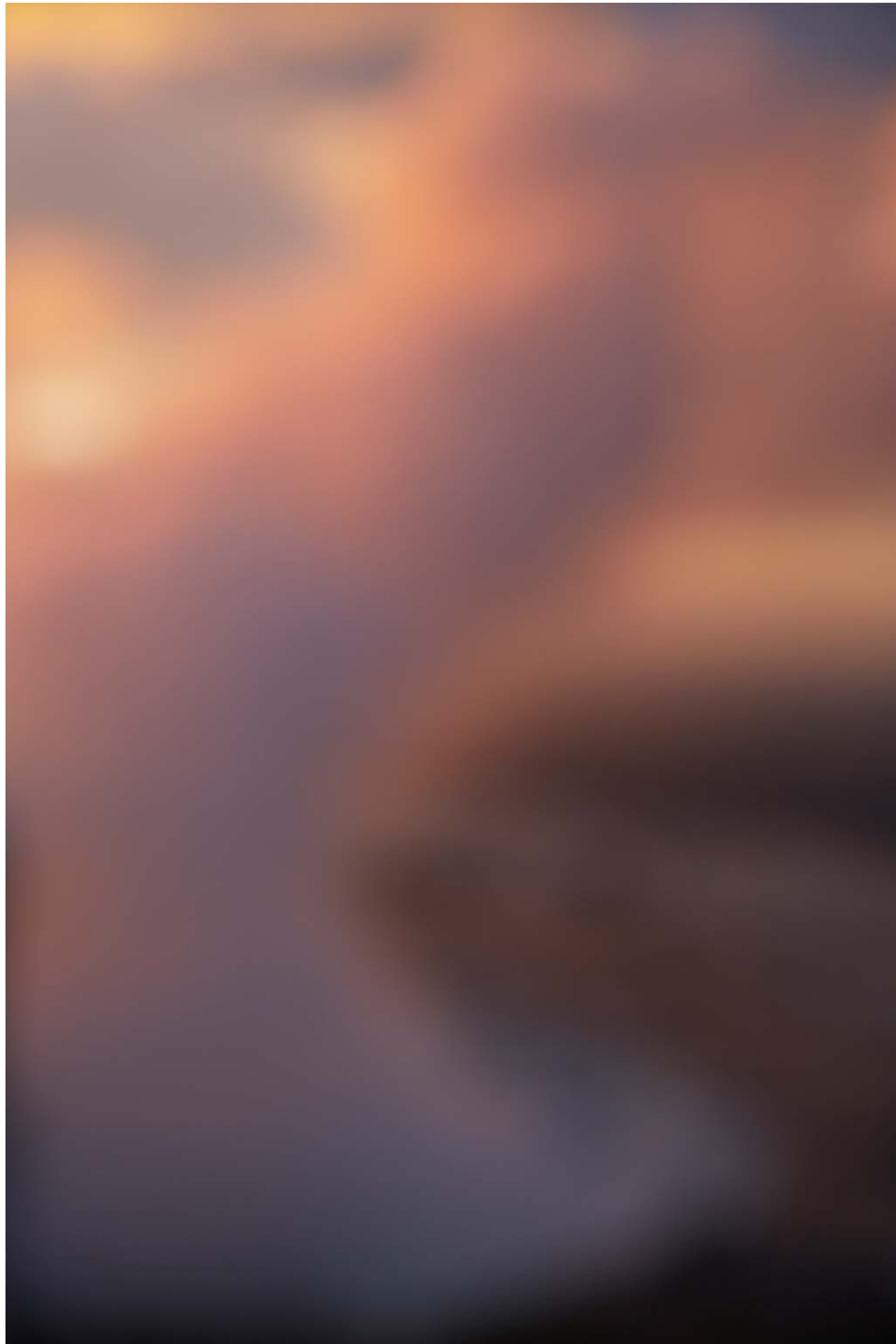
Richard Long makes art that results from his love of nature, specifically his experiences in vast rural environments. Using England's Dartmoor National Park as his "home' ground, my prototype landscape," the British artist has visited numerous terrains, including the grasslands of Mongolia, the Nepalese Himalayas, Tanzania's Mount Kilimanjaro, and the Central Andes in South America. At the heart of Long's practice is the simple act of walking in the wilderness, which has defined his interest in making art that directly connects to the landscape. "It has always been my pleasure and intention to be in nature," he says. Taking place over several consecutive days, these journeys by foot represent independence and freedom to the artist and are unrelated to objectives such as travel or reaching a destination. Long explains, "it interests me to make walks that follow or realize original ideas... using walking as both medium and measure, I have utilized or referenced many natural and cosmic phenomena in my work, like the equinox, the midsummer and midwinter solstice, sun and moon total eclipses, and tides—measuring some walks by lunar time as opposed to the days and nights of solar time." During these excursions, Long constructs sculptures along the way—elementary forms comprising of lines, circles, squares, and spirals—and uses the earth itself as a material, turning to mud, slate, stone, and wood. "I like common materials, whatever is [at] hand," Long says, "but especially stones. I like the idea that stones are what the world is made of." The sculptures point to where the artist stopped during the walk and also functioned as a celebration of the location.

At the beginning of his career, walking allowed Long to question the mainstream sculptural practices he encountered while studying in London in the 1960s. "I felt it had barely engaged with the natural landscapes which cover our planet or used the experiences those places could offer," he says. "My work has tried to explore this potential." Walking was also practical—a way of making an imprint. As an undergraduate at St. Martin's School of Art, Long conceived the first of these works, *A Line Made by Walking* (1967), in which he formed a straight line in a field of grass through the repeated movement of his footsteps. Extending sculpture beyond traditional materials and methods, he has only ever used his hands and feet to create his works.

While the outdoor installations and walks form the basis of what Long makes, he has always produced works in tandem that are intended for indoor and gallery spaces. "I like the freedom I have won to make art in either remote places or in a city museum," Long says. "It's just different ways to put my work in the world—one solitary for the imagination, one public for the senses." Many of his indoor projects are directly informed by the walks, such as the photographs he takes to document what he has made in the landscape. Others, such as the mud drawings, exist as a category in themselves. The artist's work at the U.S. Embassy, *Untitled*, is a composition of this type. It consists of white China clay that has been applied to two joined-up wooden boards. Spanning four meters in length, the abstract patterns seen on the surface are generated by the artist's hand, as well as his maneuvering of the board. "Each panel is made



upright, with the hand marks at the top, and the splashes and run-downs falling below," Long explains, "so I make the top half of the work, and nature, gravity, makes the lower half." The artist works quickly, to give momentum to the splashes that are created, and intuitively, without thinking about the overall image that is coming into being. "By putting the two panels together, it can be seen that, although made in exactly the same way, each half is completely different in its micro-scale." Long first used mud, which he considers interchangeable with clay, in 1969, creating a spiral shape from boot-prints on the floor of a gallery. Termed by the artist as drawings, rather than paintings—which traditionally involve the use of a brush—the mud works are characterized by their unrepeatable quality and focus on raw materials. As Long says, "I use the world as I find it."



# Catherine Opie

Untitled #10, 2013  
Pigment print  
77 in x 51 in (195.6 cm x 129.5 cm)

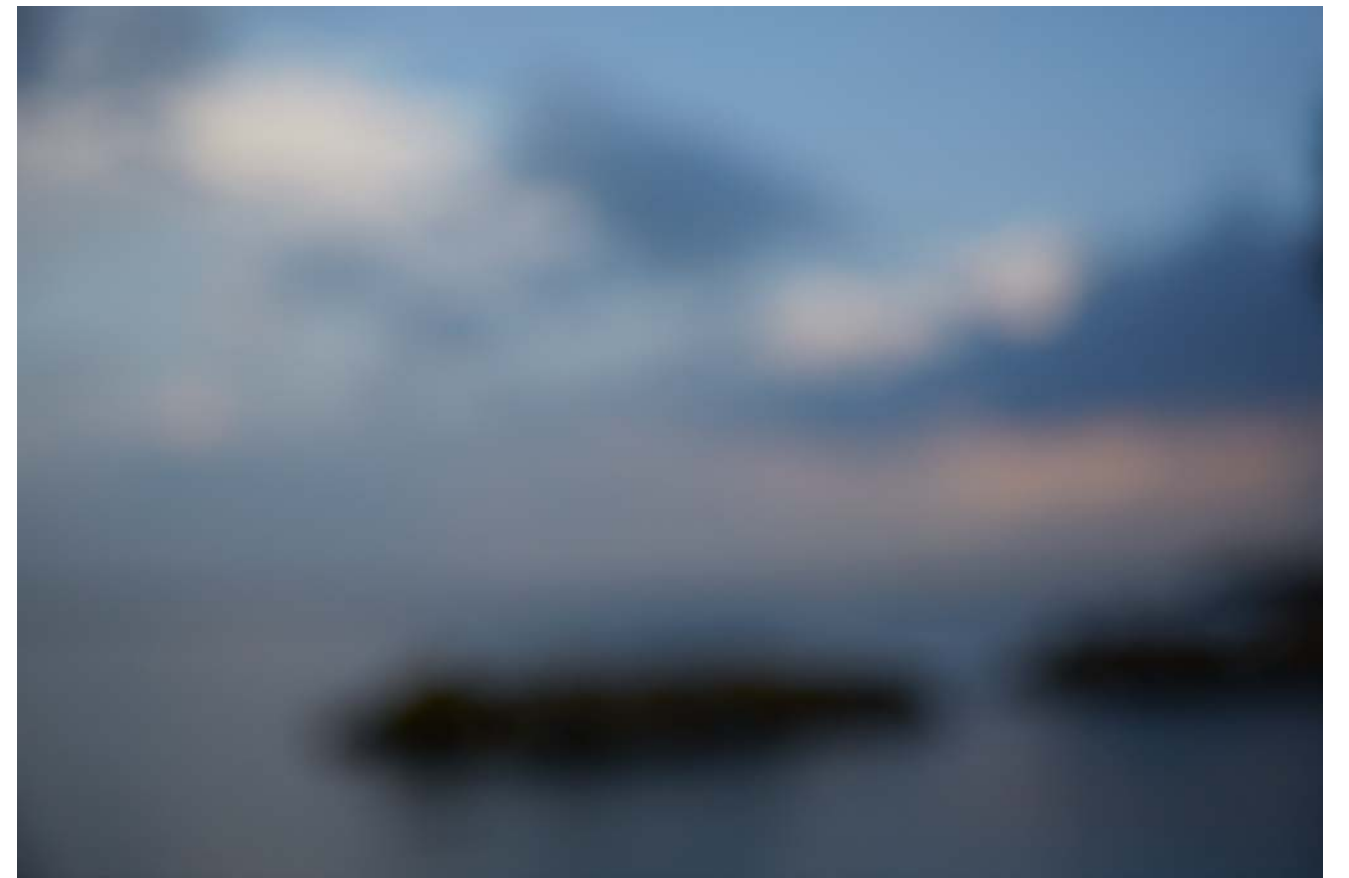
Catherine Opie has spent over three decades using photography to explore identity within the United States. Considering how specific groups of people are represented and perceived—whether high school football players and surfers or the artist’s friends from lesbian and gay communities—Opie’s carefully constructed images have challenged assumptions about various sections of American society, while offering them visibility. The artist primarily uses the genres of studio portraiture and landscape photography, as well as the tropes of street photography. Aspiring to make mainstream culture more inclusive, Opie has spoken about “the need to add a conversation to a given situation, because something is left out of the telling of the story.” The complex nature of landscapes, whether rural or urban, have also been a crucial part of Opie’s work. In several series, such as *Freeways* (1994–95) and *Mini-malls* (1997–98), the artist relies solely upon the environment to reflect on humanity and our relationship with the world.

After earning a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1985 and a Master of Fine Arts degree from California Institute of the Arts in 1988, Opie first gained attention in the 1990s through portraits that celebrated LGBTQ+ communities and performance artists in San Francisco and Los Angeles (*Being and Having* (1991) and *Portraits* (1993–97)). These early works initiated the importance of specific American locales within Opie’s work, and the quality of “Americanness” has continued to permeate her compositions. The artist grew up surrounded by an extensive collection of U.S. political campaign memorabilia. Acquired by her father, and now held at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History, Opie was aware as a child of the various associations attached to these objects. “I think that prevails throughout my work,” she has said, “being an American.”

In 1997, Opie embarked on a major landscape series, *American Cities*, in which she documented Minneapolis, St. Louis, Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago. These dramatic black-and-white panoramas revolved around empty streetscapes and grand architectural sites, elaborating on the relationship between people and place. Having grown up in the Midwest, amidst cornfields and giant boulders, “the positioning of my surroundings helped me think about what place meant.” The impact of the natural world was explored in detail for the first time when Opie photographed fishing sheds in Minnesota (*Icehouses*, 2001)—temporary huts built onto frozen lakes that are inhabited for three months of the year. Opie portrayed these intimate structures, which are dominated by the landscape, as disappearing into the horizon line, making for “this really incredible sublime moment.”

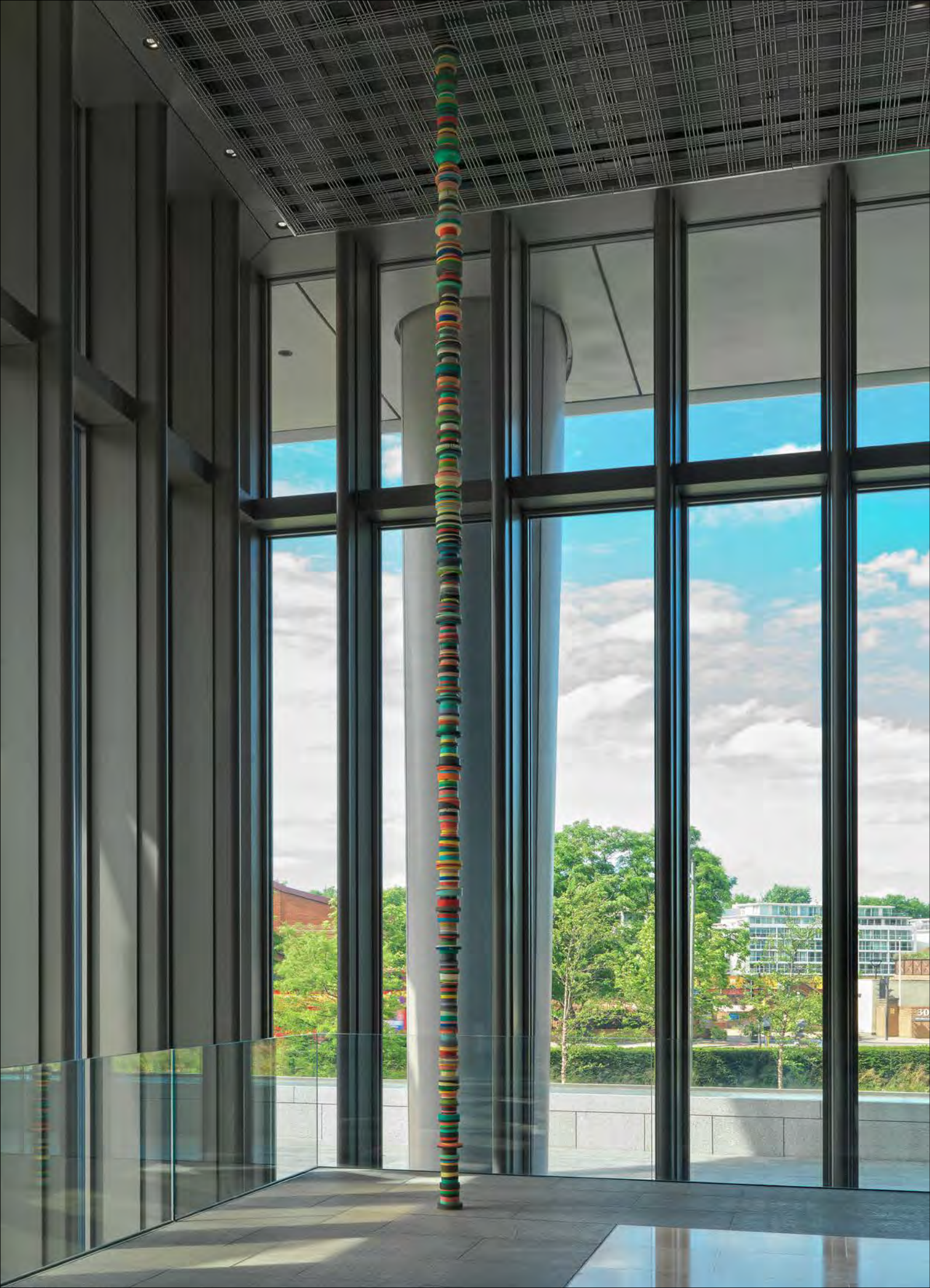
The two works displayed at the Embassy, *Untitled #10* and *Untitled #11*, are part of an ongoing series that Opie began in 2012. “The most radical change in the evolution of making landscapes was when I began to make abstract landscapes,” she says. *Untitled #10* depicts Niagara Falls at sunrise, taken from a hotel window. “The fog was rising up out of the falls, and the sun was turning the clouds vibrant colors that changed within seconds during the sun’s movement,” Opie says. For *Untitled #11*, the artist stopped on the

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INTERESTED IN THAT**



Untitled #11, 2013  
Pigment print  
40 in × 60 in (101.6 cm × 152.4 cm)

side of Highway 198, which leads to Three Rivers, to capture California's monumental Lake Kaweah. Heavily abstracted, containing thoroughly blurred and atmospheric forms, both photographs are unified by their invisibility as iconic American landscapes. Just as Opie's portraits dismantle preconceived notions about her subjects, these works question how archetypal tourist sites can be understood. "Debunking the icon, the cliché—I'm always interested in that," Opie says. "At this point, does it mean anything to go to the Grand Canyon and take out your phone and take a picture of it and put it on Facebook?" Rather than restore the romantic, lofty postcard image of the American National Park, which was the objective of the California pictorialist artists working at the beginning of the twentieth century, these images reimagine and redefine the scenery, encouraged as much by the banal as the beautiful. Further, Opie's pictures ask us to reassess what we consider to be "real" or "true." By focusing on the temporal and transformative qualities of nature, Opie encourages a more democratic approach, as it relates to looking and connecting with an image—an objective that forms the basis of her practice.



# Eva Rothschild

*Technical Support*, 2016  
Jesmonite, Steel  
20 ft 4 in (height) × 3.5 in to 6 in (diameter)  
(6.23 m (height) × 8.89 cm × 15.24 cm (diameter))

*Technical Support*, a sculpture by Irish artist Eva Rothschild, consists of small cylindrical discs of similar sizes that have been layered to create an elongated vertical structure. Recalling the symmetry of a stack of coins, the 24-feet-4-inches-high work also brings to mind the scale and gravity associated with architectural monuments. Forming part of an ongoing series of the same name, Rothschild explains that “*Technical Support* is a single thing, but it’s also a type of work.”

In these multipart compositions, which often give the impression of balancing precariously, each disc features horizontal bands of two or three bright colors. Viewed together, the effect is that of a column of stripes.

Precise as well as playful, *Technical Support* is typical of the visual language Rothschild has developed over the past two decades that revolves around stacked objects in space, “whereby something is joined together to make something larger.” The episodic quality of her work has allowed the artist to explore ideas relating to mass, materiality, and volume while generating forms that reference urban and domestic sites, classical architecture, and nature. Using materials that include concrete, steel, and Perspex, Rothschild draws from the tradition of minimalist sculpture through abstract arrangements that blur the boundary between art and architecture and ask viewers to reconsider the environments they encounter every day. As the artist points out, her sculpture is about “an object that sort of becomes part of the landscape but is clearly not the landscape.”

Captivated by the physical experience of sculpture, Rothschild places the power of looking at the center of her practice: “One of the things I wanted to do [with *Technical Support*] is to break up a surface so that the eye is constantly moving over the piece,” she says. “That sense of a lack of a unified whole is something that I think is very present through most of my work. Making the eye work harder, it’s visually engaging, but also increasing that moment of transference between the object and the person.” Rothschild often manipulates materials to create an illusory quality—something both familiar and unfamiliar at the same time—which adds to this aim. Color is another essential component of her practice, described by the artist as a material in its own right that increases the “communicative possibility” of a work.

The starting point for *Technical Support* was an object in the artist’s studio that initially functioned as a tool. “Rolls of tape—masking tape, duct tape, Sellotape—which I’ve always referred to as the basic technical support of work,” she says. As well as being relied on like an adhesive, the artist would use the rolls to prop up or balance other sculptures that she was in the process of making. “The studio is so important,” she explains, “especially in sculptural making, because it’s often the things along the way that point you to what comes next. What is really important in a practice is that the work begets the other work.” The rolls of tape that have been used to construct *Technical Support* are not the exact objects sourced from Rothschild’s workroom but replicas of those objects cast from Jesmonite. The artist often uses casting as a device that can challenge how we look at our surroundings, as “it sets up a mistrust





of materiality. It upsets our assumptions about the objects in front of us." Casting also highlights Rothschild's belief in the potential of her sculptures to transcend their physical properties. "That sense of having something that was alike to the object seemed so much more full of imaginative possibility," she says. "An object having a power beyond its material presence seems very natural to me."

The artist's view of her sculptures, as objects infused with magical properties, emphasizes the value that she places on being with her work rather than reading it. The role played by the viewer is consequently of paramount importance, with each individual "bringing [their] own way of looking" to the work. The experience of appearing before *Technical Support* and navigating its material presence underlines the communication that Rothschild always seeks to encourage through her art, "something that goes from the eye to the object and back."

# Alison Watt

*Host, pinwheel* 2006–2018  
Oil on canvas  
Overall: 10 ft x 14 ft (3.05 m x 4.27 m)

Made from two vast panels that have been placed together, *Host, pinwheel* depicts a piece of soft white fabric that has been loosely tied into a knot. The rise and fall of the smooth cloth have been magnified, creating a sense of intimacy as well as ambiguity. Similarly, the work's physical structure, with its visibly partitioned canvas, is suggestive of a divide between real and constructed environments. The painting is part of an ongoing series by Scottish artist Alison Watt in which she explores the compelling and multifaceted qualities of fabric. Having focused on documenting the female figure at the beginning of her career, which resulted in the artist working with life models for ten years, Watt has been dedicated to exploring the power of materials since the late 1990s. "Fabric is evocative," she explains. "The longer I look at it, I begin to lose my connection with it and its original purpose. It seems to exist on the boundary of the material and the immaterial, often suggesting something other than itself."

Watt's interest in textiles is nonetheless deeply connected to the human form. Following her graduation from the Glasgow School of Art in 1988, she chose to paint the female figure—namely close friends and family members. "I remember quite vividly when I made my first painting of drapery alone," she reflects. "I was sitting in the studio looking at the space from where my subject had risen. There was an imprint on the cloth which still bore her weight—I was struck by her absence and how powerfully that conjured her presence. Something beautiful was created by her leaving." Captivated by the impact of this act, the artist began to make paintings that were increasingly removed from what was directly in front of her. As she explains, the works evolved into "what I was thinking rather than just what I was seeing." In these compositions, human life is indicated rather than explicitly portrayed through the landscape of the cloth.

Historical painting has been another long-standing inspiration for Watt. In 2006, she began a two-year residency at the National Gallery, London, which enabled her to study reproductions of a number of works in the museum's collection. Amongst these were two portraits: Jacques-Louis David's *Jacobus Blauw* (1795) and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's *Monsieur de Norvins* (1811-12). The sitters in these pictures wear a clothing accessory that was fashionable during this period—the white knotted cravat. The first two paintings Watt made during the residency depicted large, looped shapes that imitated this garment. Francisco de Zurbarán's *Saint Francis in Meditation* (1635-39) was another work that resonated with the artist. *Host, pinwheel* draws directly from this painting, considering the atmosphere that is created by private, interior spaces. Watt has cited her fascination with Francis's gaping mouth, his stigmata wounds, the eye sockets of the human skull that he holds, and, critically, the heavy robe he wears, which she has described as "almost like a living mass." The negative spaces in *Host, pinwheel*—the areas in between the deep folds, the pronounced opening at the knot's center—are seen by Watt as points of entry that bring the viewer into the picture. "It feels like you are entering that world and becoming part of its landscape," she adds. "There is a blurring between the interior and exterior of the work. It engulfs you." Like the fabric itself, these voids become the carrier of something that is sensed rather than seen.



# Cerith Wyn Evans

*Neon Forms (after Noh IV)*, 2017  
White neon  
18 ft x 12 ft x 11 4/5 ft (5.50 m x 3.69 m x 3.60 m)



Hanging vertically in mid-air, traversing almost twenty feet, *Neon Forms (after Noh IV)*, 2017, is an immense and imposing sculpture. It is made from a network of delicate white neon glass tubes that have been shaped into frenetic clusters of circles and scribbles amidst stark, singular lines, all of which emit a steady, bright glow. This work is part of a group of sixteen sculptures made by Welsh artist Cerith Wyn Evans between 2015 and 2019 in which he draws upon the tradition of Noh theatre. Originating in Japan in the fourteenth century, this classical dance-drama, as well as Japanese culture more widely, has been of longstanding interest to Wyn Evans.

The curved and intersecting shapes that constitute *Neon Forms (after Noh IV)*, and corresponding works in the series, are based on *kata* diagrams that offer direction to Noh actors. "The diagrams show how to perform a particular role and specifically how to address the choreology [or the notation of movement]: the footsteps, head gestures, the stamps on the floor, the flicking of the kimono, position of the fan," Wyn Evans explains. Viewed by the artist, these musical scores, or maps, where printed notes become gestures that are acted out in space, "begged an interpretation."

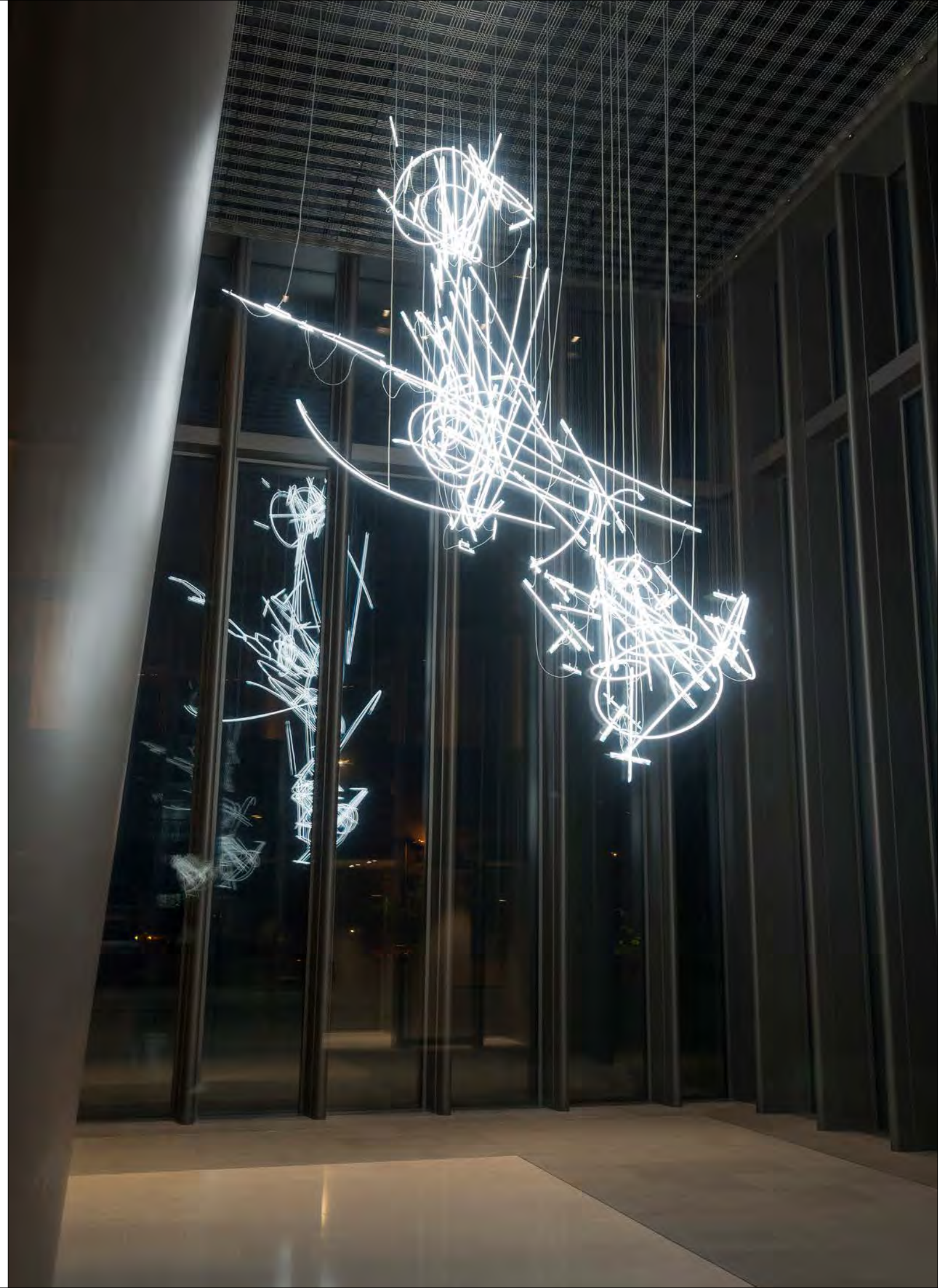
Turning the *kata* diagrams into *Neon Forms* involved an elaborate set of transpositions, where the original meanings were ultimately eclipsed. The resulting shapes may no longer be symbolic or meaningful within the context of a diagram, but instead open up several associations and points of entry for the viewer. As Wyn Evans remarked, his interest to "collage space, collapse it, shatter it together" causes tension between a complex set of forms that "have multiple chains of references." Renewal is at the heart of the Noh art form, embodied by "the person who is there to recount their story, as if they were on earth, who then transforms into the true spirit of whom they are. So, it's about these places where there is a hinge into a transformative mood."

Creating the possibility of an experience that Wyn Evans terms "elastic" is a critical element within his practice. This interest in transformation is highlighted by the artist's handling of light as an evocative and ethereal medium, which his *Neon Forms* encapsulates. Wyn Evans's "drawings in space," as he describes them, underline his interest in thinking about sculpture as a way of activating and transforming the physical space it occupies, resulting in a "kind of zone for meditation and a place for reverie on the transference of energy." The neon compositions bring attention to how we perceive our surroundings while offering a counter to the traditional view of sculpture as a solely tangible object. "A lot of my work tries to interrogate optics," Wyn Evans has said, "to somehow disintegrate the scientific model of optics." Time is an equally essential component of these works. The artist envisages his sculptures as objects to be moved through and experienced, like a journey. This quality is particularly palpable in Wyn Evans's larger installations, such as his 2017 commission for Tate Britain, *Forms in Space... by Light (in Time)*, which was constructed from nearly two kilometers of neon lighting.

As a student at Central Saint Martins, London, in the late 1970s, Wyn Evans was initially interested in making experimental films, and



he later assisted influential director Derek Jarman. He graduated from the Royal College of Art, London, with a master's degree in film and video in 1984. His focus on site-specific sculptural works evolved throughout the next decade, culminating in the large-scale sculptures and installations made in the 2000s, which continue to form a key part of the artist's practice. As with Wyn Evans's early films, in which he mixed and edited various sources to create anti-narrative structures, he has continued to develop a body of work based on questioning representation and a single perspective. "I feel there's a need to get into the thick of what our lived experience is at the beginning of the twenty-first century," he explains. "What I am saying is, let's look at looking again."



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Printed by Global Publishing Solutions (GPS), Manila

Published by Art in Embassies / Bureau of Overseas

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