

ART IN EMBASSIES EXHIBITION
UNITED STATES EMBASSY COLOMBO



Andrè Rodriguez Pagano | **Ofrenda**, 2021
Acrylic on canvas with handmade ceramic beads collares, 72 × 66 in. (182,9 × 167,6 cm)
Courtesy of the artist, New York, New York

Art in Embassies

Established in 1963, the U.S. Department of State's Office of Art in Embassies (AIE) plays a vital role in our nation's public diplomacy through a culturally expansive mission, creating temporary and permanent exhibitions, artist programming, and publications. The Museum of Modern Art first envisioned this global visual arts program a decade earlier. In the early 1960s, President John F. Kennedy formalized it, naming the program's first director. Now with over 200 venues, AIE curates temporary and permanent exhibitions for the representational spaces of all U.S. chanceries, consulates, and embassy residences worldwide, selecting and commissioning contemporary art from the U.S. and the host countries. These exhibitions provide international audiences with a sense of the quality, scope, and diversity of both countries' art and culture, establishing AIE's presence in more countries than any other U.S. foundation or arts organization.

AIE's exhibitions allow citizens, many of whom might never travel to the United States, to personally experience the depth and breadth of our artistic heritage and values, making what has been called a "footprint that can be left where people have no opportunity to see American art."

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

Welcome

Welcome to Jefferson House and our curated exhibition of works from some of America's finest contemporary artists. Each of the artists whose work is featured in my Art in Embassies exhibition tells an important story about diversity, inclusion, identity, and America through a unique lens. When considered together, this vibrant exhibition of art pays homage to the myriad cultural backgrounds and vibrant colors that weave together to make the rich tapestry of the United States. As a woman and an immigrant with familial ties to both Asia and Latin America, I find encouragement in familiar glimpses of my own story in aspects of each of these gorgeous works of art. It is truly meaningful for me to live and work in this beautiful home, informed and inspired by this magnificent and thought-provoking exhibition.

I believe that the universal language of art can open doors for important learning and conversation. An artist communicates insights or stories about herself and her perspective on society, translating her own experiences and observations about life into her own unique language; by approaching art with an open mind, viewers can be informed or even transformed by sharing in those stories and experiences. That very exchange of opinions, feelings, and journeys can break down stereotypes, instill values, and inspire growth. In curating this exhibition, it was my hope that we could together explore what it means to be a woman, an immigrant, or a person of color. By observing these stories and honoring the journeys of these artists, we can re-frame how we understand the very fabric of the United States and what it means to be American.

My gratitude to the State Department's Office of Art in Embassies for bringing the works of these notable American artists to Colombo. My additional thanks to the Sri Lankan artists who have shared their own art to complement the Art in Embassies exhibition. I hope you enjoy these vibrant, inspiring, and thought-provoking pieces.

Ambassador Julie J. Chung

Colombo, Sri Lanka

June 2023

Carlos Betancourt (born 1966)

Carlos Betancourt's art focuses on memory, nature, communication, and his own experiences. He reexamines, recycles, and reinterprets the past, presenting it to the viewer in a contemporary environment. *Times of Illuminations, Daytime* was inspired by the artist's collection of Christmas tree toppers. Attracted to the nostalgia, movement, and luminous quality of these mass-produced items, Betancourt values their underrated beauty: "by removing these star-shaped objects from their original purpose and placing them in a new setting, their embedded and inherited memory can be 'activated,' and the elements can be appreciated in a different realm."

Betancourt graduated from the Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, with an Associate of Science degree in design. Having worked as a curator and furniture designer, he collaborates with architect Alberto Latorre on site-specific public and private commissions. His work is displayed in the collections of the National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C.; the Pérez Art Museum Miami; and the Museo de Arte de Ponce, Puerto Rico.



Carlos Betancourt | **Times of Illuminations, Daytime**, 2018

Archival inkjet print on fine art paper, 38 × 38 in. (96,5 × 96,5 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, El Portal, Florida

Stephanie S. Lee (born 1977)

Stephanie S. Lee's art references *minhwa*, Korean folk art from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Reinterpreting this art form with a modern twist, Lee places contemporary objects in a traditional Korean setting, depicting the "everlasting human desire to pursue happiness that transcends its appearance, time, and era."

Resting (쉼) and *Dreaming* (꿈) are part of her *Munjado* series, which displays Confucian virtues through alphabetical letters. Instead of Chinese characters, Lee combines Korean and English letters with images of ancient animals, such as the ouroboros, the symbol of eternal destruction and rebirth. These prints represent her journey towards happiness and hope as a wife, mother, and female artist.

Along with an advanced certificate in conservation and digital curation, Lee earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in graphic design and Master of Science degree in museums and digital culture at the Pratt Institute, New York. She is the founding director of the Garage Art Center and the Korean Folk Art, Inc., New York. Her works have been exhibited at the National Museum of Korea, Seoul, and the Islip Art Museum, East Islip, New York.



Stephanie S. Lee | **Resting (침)**, 2022
Limited edition original photo prints under
acrylic glass on Fuji Crystal Archive paper
19 3/8 x 16 in. (49,3 x 40,6 cm)
Courtesy of the artist, Bayside, New York



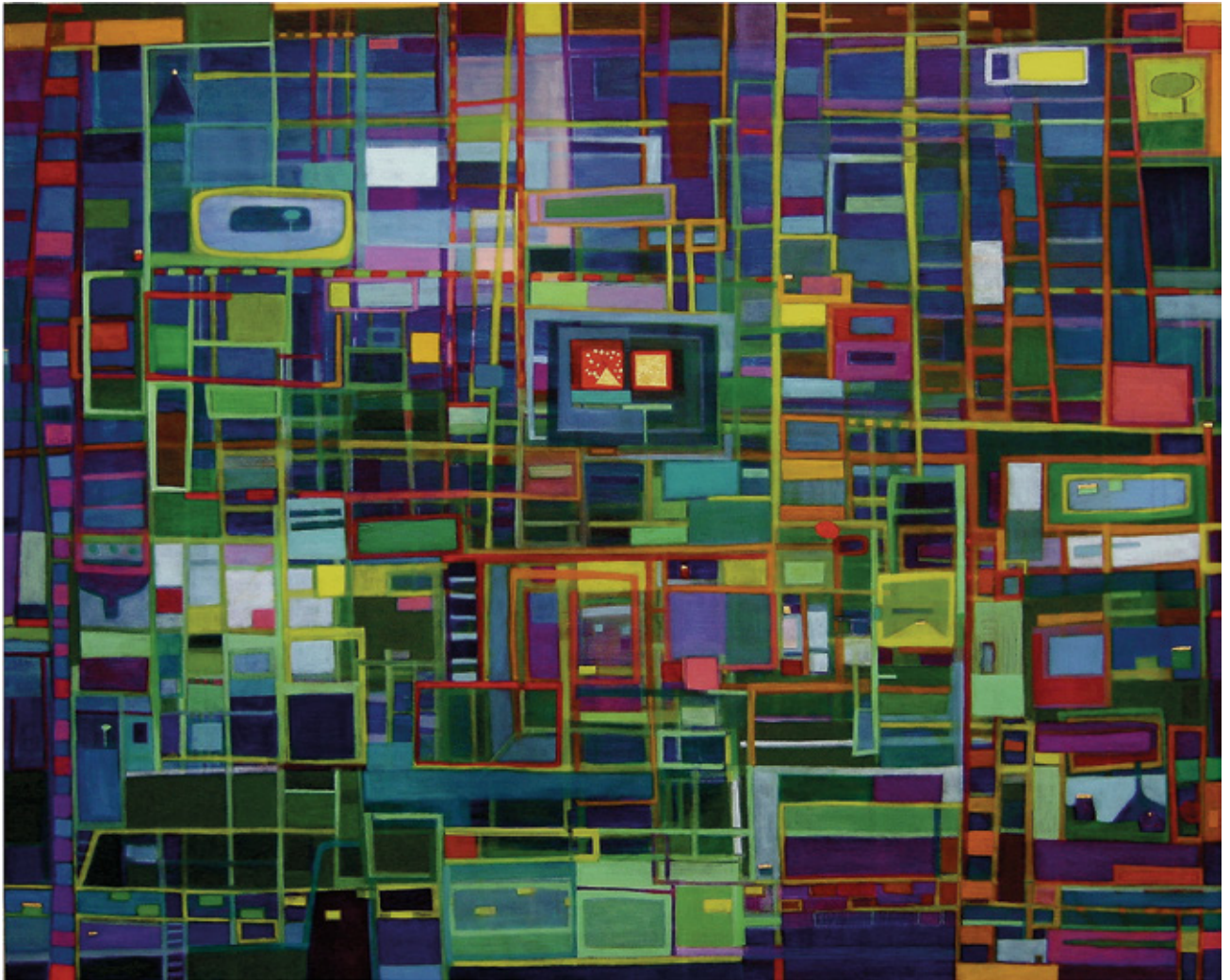
Stephanie S. Lee | **Dreaming (꿈)**, 2022
Limited edition original photo prints under
acrylic glass on Fuji Crystal Archive paper
19 3/8 x 16 in. (49,3 x 40,6 cm)
Courtesy of the artist, Bayside, New York

Juri Morioka (born 1964)

*“City of Peace is wherever you want it to be
Let beautiful sound echo in the air
under Moon and Stars and Electric Lights”*

Juri Morioka describes her work in poetic verse and approaches each canvas independently without using sketches or studies. “Outside of conscious thought, I search for harmony and form in the play of color and shapes, and a composition gradually emerges,” she says. “Then, feeling my way with my brush, I enter the painting and wander through its spaces and along its paths with a deep sense of belonging.” She invites the viewer to join her on the same adventure, “sharing the belief that everything has a life of its own.”

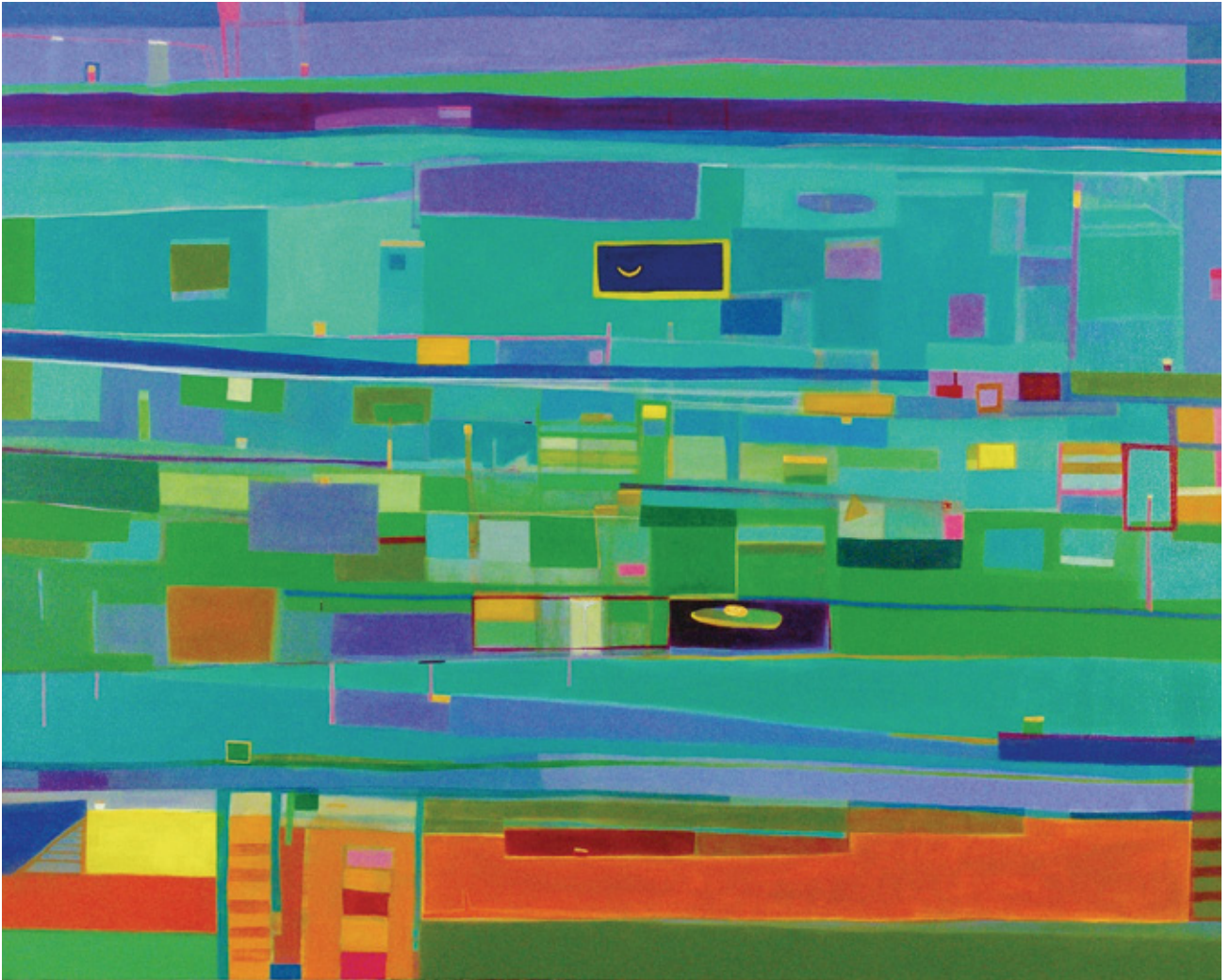
Morioka’s mother was a dancer in her youth, and her father composed and arranged music. Both parents instilled in her “a passion for traveling and meeting interesting people, and she grew up sharing their dreams of peace and their love of all things American.” She earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Parsons School of Design, New York, and her work has been featured in publications such as *Art in America* and *Bijutsu Techo*.



Juri Morioka | **City of Peace (The Room of the Tree)**, 2008

Oil and gold on canvas, 48 × 60 in. (121,9 × 152,4 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, New York, New York



Juri Morioka | **Moon and Stars and Electric Lights**, 2011

Acrylic and gold on canvas, 48 × 60 in. (121,9 × 152,4 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, New York, New York

Andrè Rodriguez Pagano (born 1983)

Incorporating Afro-Caribbean, Spanish, and Taíno influences, Andrè Rodriguez Pagano creates acrylic paintings and ceramic-acrylic works that explore Puerto Rico's cultural roots and complex history. Interplaying abstract and traditional image-making, Pagano reworks symbols from his childhood, as well as from Santería and Roman Catholic religious practices. The vibrant, swift brushstrokes in his *Ofrenda* paintings imitate the movement of swaying skirts dancing to Puerto Rican *bomba* music. "Handmade ceramic *collares* charge the paintings with protective blessings, reflecting the religious altars and talismans that populate Puerto Rican households."

Pagano's formal training began at age six when he apprenticed for famed abstract Puerto Rican artists Domingo García and Andres Bueso. He later received his Bachelor of Arts degree in painting and photography from Escuela de Artes Plásticas y Diseño de Puerto Rico, San Juan. His work has been exhibited at the Museo de las Americas, San Juan, and El Sur MX, Mexico City.



André Rodriguez Pagano | **Ofrenda**, 2021

Acrylic on canvas with handmade ceramic beads collares, 72 × 66 in. (182,9 × 167,6 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, New York, New York



André Rodriguez Pagano | **Ofrenda III**, 2021

Acrylic on canvas, 72 × 60 in. (182,9 × 152,4 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, New York, New York

Carlos Rolón (born 1970)

Carlos Rolón is known for his multidisciplinary practice with works that employ a wide range of media to explore themes of craft, ritual, beauty, spirituality, identity, and its relationship to art history. His Puerto Rican heritage allows him to explore ideas that directly deal with questions of inclusion and cultural identity. He produces a hybrid language of exuberant flora paintings—like *Gild the Lily I* and *Gild the Lily II*—sculpture, social practice, and site-specific installations composed of diverse materials that offer opportunities for self-reflection, rich symbolism, and community engagement, bridging the divide between public and private.

Rolón earned an Associate of Science degree in design from the Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale, Florida. He is the recipient of the prestigious Joan Mitchell Foundation Award for Painting and Sculpture, and his work is housed in the permanent collections of the Bass Museum of Art, Miami; the Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York; the City of Chicago Public Art Collection; Daegu Art Museum, South Korea; the Pinchuk Art Centre, Kyiv, Ukraine; and the Museum Het Domein, Sittard, The Netherlands, among others.



Carlos Rolón | **Gild the Lily I**, 2017
Archival pigment inks on Crane Museo 365 gsm
fine art paper, 46 × 35 in. (116,8 × 88,9 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Kotaro Nukaga Gallery,
Tokyo, Japan

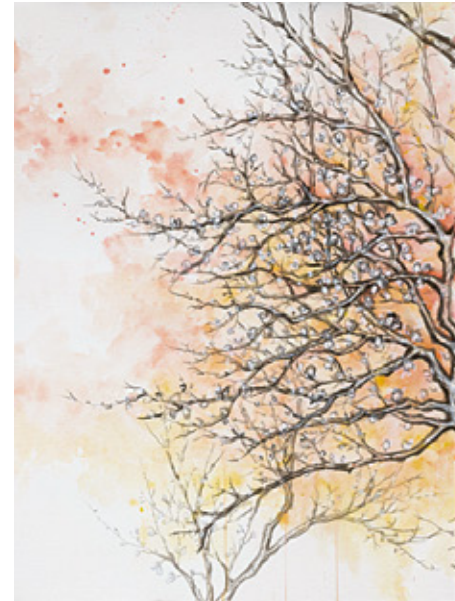


Carlos Rolón | **Gild the Lily II**, 2017
Archival pigment inks on Crane Museo 365 gsm
fine art paper, 46 × 35 in. (116,8 × 88,9 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Kotaro Nukaga Gallery,
Tokyo, Japan

Cindy Shih (born 1982)

Cindy Shih utilizes techniques from brush painting, Italian fresco, and Chinese calligraphy to discuss gender, power, and race. She begins with thin, burnished layers of Venetian plaster to texturize the composition, then mixes Sumi ink and pigments that settle in the cracks. Completed during her residency with the Consulate General of France in San Francisco, *Almond Blossoms* is inspired by Vincent van Gogh's series of the same name. Symbolizing revitalization and rebirth, Van Gogh's series was made when the French Impressionists were influenced by Japanese prints and featured bold color and delicate lines in their works. "To me, it seemed like the perfect intersection to reinvent this series over a century later... It was a meditation to honor the way life has always been interconnected, in a time [when] the world begins to re-emerge from the pandemic and renew again," she says.

Born in Taiwan, Shih immigrated to Los Angeles with her family and currently lives in San Francisco. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in communication and media studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her works have been exhibited at SOMArts Cultural Center and the de Young Art Museum, both in San Francisco.





Cindy Shih | **Almond Blossoms**, 2021

Quadriptych; pastel, Sumi-e ink, and egg tempera, 22 × 30 in. (55,9 × 76,2 cm) each of 4

Courtesy of the artist, Walnut, California

Acknowledgments

Washington, D.C.

Imtiaz Hafiz, Curator

Morgan Fox, Curatorial Assistant

Jamie Arbolino, Registrar

Tabitha Brackens, Editor

Megan Pannone, Editor

Tori See, Editor

Amanda Brooks, Imaging Manager

Colombo

Heidi Hattenbach, Counselor for Public Affairs

Chamalie Weerasekera, Cultural Affairs Specialist

Naomi Marshall, Resources Specialist

The General Services Office and Facilities Management Team

Vienna

Nathalie Mayer, Graphic Designer

Manila

Global Publishing Solutions, Printing



Art in Embassies

U.S. DEPARTMENT *of* STATE

Published by Art in Embassies | U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C. | June 2023

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