



Art in Embassies Exhibition  
United States Embassy Banjul

**SETORDJI Leisure, 2017**

Acrylic on canvas, 47 ¼ x 67 in. (120 x 170,2 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Accra, Ghana

# 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 United States 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/>

I am a woman  
Phenomenally.  
A phenomenal  
woman,  
That's me.

Excerpted from **Phenomenal Woman** by Maya Angelou

With this powerful declaration, the legendary writer, poet, and activist Maya Angelou expressed the magnificence of women. Her words invite us to celebrate those who are confident and comfortable in their own skin. They are brave, beautiful, and intelligent. They are phenomenal.

The Art in Embassies exhibition, curated for the Chief of Mission Residence in Banjul, The Gambia, pays homage to women. The exhibition includes works created by, for, or inspired by women. Whether it is a vase of whimsical flowers painted by esteemed New York artist Knox Martin, whose work often drew inspiration from women, or the portrayal of a seated woman by internationally renowned Ghanaian artist Kofi Setordji, or even the soulful portrait of a man captured by up-and-coming Ghanaian artist Mimi Adu-Serwaah, each artwork demonstrates the phenomenal ability of women to inspire or create.

Diverse in its representation, we have included works from the United States, Ghana, and The Gambia. Among the creators are famed African American artists Synthia Saint James and Jacob Lawrence. Also featured is a drawing by John Mendy, an emerging Gambian artist, discovered by the enterprising Key Art Gallery, The Gambia. And, of course, this exhibition would not be complete without a piece by the extraordinary Isha Fofana, a Gambian artist whose Mama Africa Art Residence and Art Center was razed by the Jammeh regime. Fofana later rebuilt it as a shining example of a woman's spectacular resilience and promise.

As you explore this exhibition, I hope you are moved. Art is a testament to the boundless potential inherent in every individual, regardless of gender. It reminds us that we all have the capacity to be phenomenal.

Ambassador Sharon L. Cromer

Banjul, The Gambia  
February 2024

## Mimi Adu-Serwaah (born 1994)

"I've always tried to celebrate womanhood, faith, and a sense of belonging within my Afrofuturistic body of work. It's an empowering opportunity to present a compelling and personal narrative."

Mimi Adu-Serwaah's paintings imagine the galaxy inhabiting the human body. Using a marbling technique, she presents glimpses of the cosmos peeking through her subjects' black skin, a design effect she describes as "kaleidoscopic glitches." Adu-Serwaah represented Ghana at the Pan-African Biennale of Luanda in Angola and has participated in the Ghana Trade Exhibition and the Black Star Fashion & Arts Festival in Accra. Originally a pharmacist, Adu-Serwaah completed her doctorate at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana.



## ADU-SERWAAH

**The essence of a man, 2021**

Acrylic on canvas, rhinestones, 59

1/16 x 39 3/8 in. (150 x 100 cm)

Courtesy of the artist,

Accra, Ghana

## Isha Fofana (born 1965)

Isha Fofana is a Gambian artist committed to empowering women and girls. An icon of her country's strength and resilience, she rebuilt her art colony after the former President Jammeh destroyed it during his despotic regime. Today, Mama Africa Art Residence and Art Center is a nonprofit organization that includes training programs for young people and a gallery focusing on contemporary Gambian art and culture. In 2018, she was acknowledged by the Institute for Travel and Tourism of The Gambia for her outstanding service and contribution towards the development of Gambian culture and tourism.





**FOFANA Balle Kou (Sweep Him), 2014**

Mixed media on canvas, 57 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 21 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (145,5 x 55,5 cm)

Courtesy of the artist and Mama Africa Arts Center, Tanji, The Gambia

## Jacob Lawrence (1917–2000)

Jacob Lawrence, who lived much of his life in lower Manhattan, was an American modern painter whose subjects were history and urban life. Born in Atlantic City, New Jersey, Lawrence is best known for his narrative series of tempera paintings based on his own life and those of his peers who migrated from the South to the North. His vivid canvases typically have bold planes of color and symbolic elements of the African American heritage of struggles, aspirations, and accomplishments. His paintings are a unique blend of sensibilities—part narrative mural painting, part social realism, and part modernist abstraction.

Throughout his career, Lawrence taught at several institutions, including Black Mountain College in North Carolina, the Skowhegan School in Maine, and at the Art Students League, New School for Social Research, and Pratt Institute, all in New York. Throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, he committed himself to commissions, especially murals and limited-edition prints, for the benefit of nonprofit organizations, including New York's Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, for which **Supermarket Flora** was created.



**LAWRENCE** Supermarket Flora, 1997

Silkscreen on paper, 38 x 30 in. (96,5 x 76,2 cm) | Courtesy of the Foundation for Art and Preservation in Embassies, Washington, D.C. © 2024 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

## Knox Martin (1923–2022)

Embracing pattern, geometric structure, and organic references, painter and sculptor Knox Martin engaged with major postwar trends, including abstract expressionism, color field painting, and pop art, without adhering to any singular artistic movement. Throughout his seven-decade career, Martin's subject matter varied widely; however, such motifs as the female nude played a consistent, prominent role in his body of work. In particular, Martin consistently sought inspiration from nature, as highlighted in these brightly colored, small-scale depictions of flowers.

Born in Barranquilla, Colombia, Martin moved to New York City in 1927. After serving in World War II, he attended the Art Students League of New York, an independent art school known for its innovative, studio-based education. Martin would later teach at his alma mater and other schools, including the Yale Graduate School of the Arts, New Haven, Connecticut; New York University; and the University of Minnesota. His work is in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Museum of Modern Art, both in New York.



**MARTIN** *Irises*, 2019

Hand-painted serigraph, 24 1/8 x 25 3/4 in. (61,3 x 65,4 cm) | Courtesy of the artist and Hollis Taggart, New York ©  
2024 Knox Martin / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



**MARTIN** *Untitled*, 2021

Watercolor and graphite on paper, 14 x 12 in. (35,6 x 30,5 cm) | Courtesy of the artist and Hollis Taggart, New York  
© 2024 Knox Martin / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



**MARTIN** *Untitled*, n.d.

Watercolor and graphite on paper, 13 ½ x 12 in. (34,3 x 30,5 cm) | Courtesy of the artist and Hollis Taggart, New York © 2024 Knox Martin / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



**MARTIN** *Untitled, n.d.*

Watercolor and graphite on paper, 12 x 9 in. (30,5 x 22,9 cm) | Courtesy of the artist and Hollis Taggart, New York ©  
2024 Knox Martin / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York





**MARTIN** *Untitled*, n.d.

Watercolor and graphite on paper, 15 ½ x 13 in. (39,4 x 33 cm) | Courtesy of the artist and Hollis Taggart, New York  
© 2024 Knox Martin / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

## John S. Mendy (born 1997)

“I create my artwork to express how I feel—how I see things around me and in the world—and also to educate people.”

John S. Mendy specializes in hyperrealistic drawings utilizing charcoal, graphite, and pen. He creates his artwork at his home in Lamin, The Gambia, driven by the desire to express his emotions and observations and provide education through art. A self-taught artist, he began drawing at the age of ten.

Mendy has been honored by the Diago Project and at the Art Bantaba Portrait Competition at the National Centre for Arts and Culture in The Gambia, both supported by the Daughters of Africa Foundation. His artwork has been featured in group exhibitions at the Key Art Gallery in The Gambia, and he regularly contributes to exhibitions as a member of the country’s thriving artistic community.



**MENDY** *The Child*, 2020

Charcoal and graphite on canvas, 23 5/8 x 23 5/8 in. (60 x 60 cm)

Courtesy of the artist and Key Art Gallery, The Gambia

## 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. Saint James also credits her family for her creative ambition, explaining, "I believe a lot of my color and themes comes from my DNA."

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.



**SAINT JAMES** *Stilt Dancers*, 1988

Serigraph, 31 ½ x 25 ½ in. (80 x 64,8 cm)

Collection of Art in Embassies, Washington, D.C.; Gift of the artist



**SAINT JAMES** Offering to Oshun, 1992

Print, 25 x 31 in. (63,5 x 78,7 cm)

Collection of Art in Embassies, Washington, D.C.; Gift of the artist



**SAINT JAMES** *Daughters*, 1992

Serigraph, 26 x 32 ¼ in. (66 x 81,9 cm)

Collection of Art in Embassies, Washington, D.C.; Gift of the artist



**SAINT JAMES** *The Dream*, 2013

Limited edition print (artist proof), 24 x 18 in. (61 x 45,7 cm)  
Collection of Art in Embassies, Washington, D.C.; Gift of the artist



## Kofi Setordji (born 1957)

Kofi Setordji, considered one of Ghana's preeminent multimedia artists, explores historical themes and everyday life to spark "awareness and debate." Largely self-taught, he worked as a commercial and graphic artist, which included painting billboards, before dedicating his practice to fine arts. Setordji has exhibited in venues worldwide, such as the United States, France, Italy, Germany, Austria, South Africa, and Denmark. In addition to his work as an artist, Setordji is also a teacher and mentor at his self-designed ARTHaus Complex, an artist-in-residence program on the outskirts of Accra. He has also held teaching posts in the United States and France. Born in Accra, Setordji currently lives and practices in Akuapim-Mampong, Ghana.



**SETORDJI** *Leisure*, 2017

Acrylic on canvas, 47 ¼ x 67 in. (120 x 170,2 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Accra, Ghana

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