



## Art in Embassies

U.S. DEPARTMENT *of* STATE

# Art in Embassies Exhibition: United States Embassy Bishkek

## 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."

[www.art.state.gov](http://www.art.state.gov)

## Welcome

This exhibition of art evokes concepts of space, timelessness, mobility, and the feeling of freedom. Abstraction is open to interpretation—all it requires is for the viewer to have an open, inquisitive mind. Transcendent art finds its way over borders, navigating diverse cultures and environments and overcoming censorship.

Many of the American pieces in this exhibition would fit perfectly within the rich Kyrgyzstani artistic tradition. During Soviet times, artists sometimes used abstraction to express the emotions and hopes they were not free to voice publicly. They often drew on the rich fabric of vibrant color—sometimes literally created with fabric—that enlivens folk art and textiles in the Kyrgyz Republic. By enabling the mix of artistic tradition with contemporary trends, Bishkek earned acclaim as a center of progressive artistic innovation and excellence. Then and now, art in the Kyrgyz Republic, like art anywhere, inspires feelings among the audience when there are limits on expression in society.

The individual artworks joining together in this ensemble can be interpreted in endless ways: Nature beheld in four seasons; cycles of elation, depression, equilibrium; the symbiosis of inspiration and meditation. As the noted Kyrgyzstani author Chingiz Aitmatov said, “Yes, there will be winter, there will be cold, there will be snowstorms, but then there will be spring again...” One constant is that all the works share a sense of impermanence, perhaps even of transhumance, moving forward naturally and confidently to the next destination.

The pieces we selected for this exhibit are—intentionally—difficult to describe with words, but easy to feel and understand. I want to convey my sincere gratitude to the artists who contributed such inspirational works. We believe that they speak a message that is unencumbered by any particular human vocabulary—a message we hope that all who spend time with them will hear and appreciate.

Ambassador Lesslie Viguerie  
Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan  
April 2024

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## Artist Biographies

### Lena Christakis (born 1997)

Lena Christakis's work elaborates on the still life genre, expanding on such motifs as the memento mori, a reminder of our mortality. Pulling from a lexicon of both invented and borrowed symbols, she juxtaposes different modes of representation within a single painting, from the hyperreal to flat and patterned. New York-based Christakis grew up in Massachusetts and Vermont and graduated from Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, with a bachelor's degree in art. Her work has been featured in group shows throughout New York City and internationally.

**Title of Artwork Displayed: Meat-O-Vision**



Year Created: 2022

Format: Oil on panel

Dimensions: 12 × 9 in. (30,5 × 22,9 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Ridgewood, New York

**Ellie Harold (born 1951)**

At age fifty-two, Ellie Harold taught herself to paint after retiring from her career as a minister and registered nurse. Over the course of ten years, she created hundreds of paintings, primarily representational still lifes and plein air landscapes in oil. Later, she began exploring abstraction, and more recently, she began to feature birds in her colorful canvases, as exemplified in

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Sanctuary and Eventually Once Again. “If I omit the[ir] silhouetted or outlined shapes, a painting often fails to resolve until I add at least a hint of avian presence atop nests of splashing color and layered texture,” she says.

Harold’s art has been exhibited in regional and national juried shows. Additionally, she has served as an Artist in Residence at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, Empire, Michigan, and the Glen Arbor Art Association, Michigan.

**Title of Artwork Displayed: Sanctuary**



Year Created: 2019

Format: Oil on canvas

Dimensions: 60 × 36 in. (152,4 × 91,4 cm)

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Courtesy of the artist, Frankfort, Michigan

**Title of Artwork Displayed: Eventually Once Again**



Year Created: 2021

Format: Oil on canvas

Dimensions: 36 × 36 in. (91,4 × 91,4 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Frankfort, Michigan

**Susan Hensel (born 1950)**

Susan Hensel combines a mixed-media practice with embroidery, harnessing both digital and manual platforms. Blending the commercial embroidery processes with sculptural considerations, she uses her deep knowledge of material to craft hard-edge sculptures from soft fabrics. Hensel also incorporates reflective thread, which, when intricately stitched throughout her work, creates a prismatic, form-altering effect. In so doing, she seeks to “create an experience for the viewer that overwhelms with color, transcends the quotidian, and

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encourages one, for even a few seconds, to step outside the narrative of the ego into a place of pure sensation.

Hensel received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, with a double major in painting and sculpture and a concentration in ceramics. She has exhibited her work extensively over the past fifty years, with over two hundred solo and group exhibitions. Hensel has curated over eighty exhibitions of emerging and mid-career artists from the United States and Canada. She has works in the collections of the Minnesota Center for Book Arts, Minneapolis; Baylor University, Waco, Texas; and the University of Colorado, Boulder.

**Title of Artwork Displayed: Twist 3**



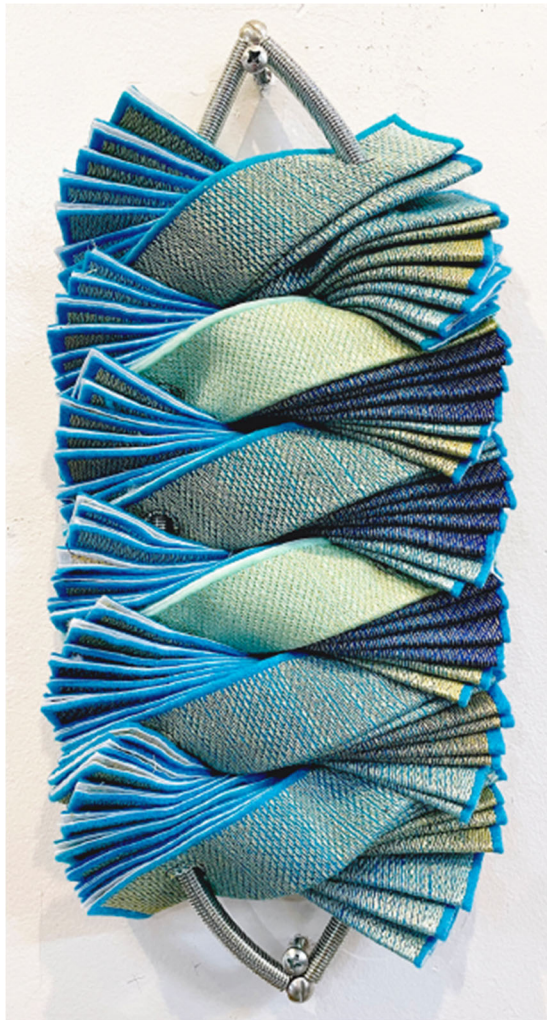
Year Created: 2021

Format: Digital embroidery and mixed media

Dimensions: 16 × 8 × 2 in. (40,6 × 20,3 × 5,1 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Minneapolis, Minnesota

**Title of Artwork Displayed: Twist 5**



Year Created: 2021

Format: Digital embroidery, steel springs

Dimensions: 16 × 8 × 2 in. (40,6 × 20,3 × 5,1 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Minneapolis, Minnesota

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**Title of Artwork Displayed: Patterns of India: Red Saris**

Year Created: 2013

Format: Pencil, acrylic paint, ink, embroidery

Dimensions: 22 × 33 in. (55,9 × 83,8 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Minneapolis, Minnesota

## **György Kepes (1906 – 2001)**

György Kepes was a photographer, painter, and educator renowned for pioneering practices and theories that bridged technology and the arts. Born in northern Hungary, Kepes initially studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest. However, he soon abandoned conventional art forms in favor of ones he felt were more socially relevant, such as photomontage, and went on to work with fellow avant-garde Hungarian artist László Moholy-Nagy in Berlin, where the two collaborated on film and stage projects. They fled Nazi rule in 1937, settling in Chicago, where Kepes directed the Light and Color Department at Moholy-Nagy's New Bauhaus school (later the Chicago Institute of Design). Then, in 1946, he joined the faculty of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, where he founded the Center for Advanced Visual Studies in 1967, a groundbreaking organization dedicated to the creative collaboration between artists and scientists. Although he had previously abandoned painting, he returned to the medium around 1950, creating large-scale, organically abstract canvases

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with richly colored glazes. The luminous quality of *Melted Glow* illustrates Kepes's career-long fascination with the visual effects of light.

In addition to his career as an artist and educator, Kepes was a prolific author, publishing several books addressing his pedagogical ideals and methods. His work has been the subject of numerous exhibitions, including a retrospective organized by the International Center of Photography in 1984. His work is in the collections of such institutions as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art, both in New York; the Art Institute of Chicago; and the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.

**Title of Artwork Displayed: Melted Glow**



Year Created: 1964

Format: Oil on canvas

Dimensions: 60 x 60 in. (152,4 x 152,4 cm)

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

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## Conn Ryder (born 1957)

“I paint from the gut. For me, abstract painting is a personal exploration through which I transform my emotional realm into a perceptible domain. My expressive work is brought forth from internally assimilating, then outwardly fashioning the emotional response to the experiences, observations, and backdrop of my life.”

Conn Ryder is an abstract expressionist painter whose inspiration is drawn from a variety of sources, including music, landscape, and her personal experiences. After studying fashion illustration at the Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and painting at the Kansas City Art Institute, Missouri, Ryder’s initial focus was representational painting, including still lifes and commissioned portraits. However, she has dedicated herself solely to abstract art for over a decade. Her paintings have been presented in multiple solo exhibitions, invitational group shows, and juried exhibitions, and are held in private and corporate collections throughout North America.

### Title of Artwork Displayed: Full Tilt



Year Created: 2021

Format: Acrylic on canvas

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Dimensions: 52 × 52 in. (132,1 × 132,1 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Westminster, Colorado

## **Julie Schnatz Rybeck (born 1959)**

“I have a passion for the sky, land and water, untouched open land; they are departure points. In turn, the tones and hues invite the viewer to revel in the beauty and grace of our land, to lose oneself while finding another moment or place.”

Color permeates the abstracted landscape paintings of Julie Schnatz Rybeck, a native of Buffalo, New York. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, and her Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Chicago. Her work has appeared in solo and group exhibitions in private, corporate, and nonprofit spaces. She has been painting and exhibiting in the Hartford, Connecticut, area since 1990.

### **Title of Artwork Displayed: Almond Dune**



Year Created: 2021

Format: Acrylic on canvas

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Dimensions: 30 × 30 in. (76,2 × 76,2 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, South Glastonbury, Connecticut

## Jessica Singerman (born 1980)

“I have discovered that, no matter where I am, outdoor activity and making artwork make me feel most like myself: whole and engaged with my environment. I want to share this experience with others through my work... I am inspired by the poetry of nature: color and light in the landscape, seasons, and the passing of time.”

Jessica Singerman creates abstracted landscape paintings that explore her experiences in nature through formal elements of color, shape, line, and composition. Born in Bangor, Maine, Singerman alternated between living in France and the United States during her early life. Singerman earned her bachelor's degree from the College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia, and her Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Delaware, Newark. Her watercolors are the subject of a book published in 2017, *Little Watercolor Squares*, and her award-winning paintings and drawings are exhibited and collected internationally.

### Title of Artwork Displayed: Field and forest with pink





Year Created: 2021

Format: Acrylic on wood

Dimensions: 18 × 24 in. (45,7 × 61 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Winston Salem, North Carolina

## **Linda Touby (1946-2021)**

In her large-scale abstract canvases, Linda Touby explored the possibilities of pictorial space and light. She paired intuitive brushstrokes with bold, horizontal bands of vibrant color, creating a profound sense of balance and harmony. To impart texture, Touby often layered the surface of her works with wax, dry pigment, and thick glazes. A native of Florida, Touby moved to New York as a teenager where she began her studies at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. She continued training at the Art Students League and later the National Academy of Art. Touby's works have been included in numerous international solo and group exhibitions at museums and galleries.

**Title of Artwork Displayed: Metamorphosis M3**



Format: Oil on canvas

Dimensions: 84 × 66 in. (213,4 × 167,6 cm)

Courtesy of Jaqueline Touby, Pound Ridge, New York

## **Judy Wise (born 1945)**

“There is no method to my approach. I paint chaos and then try to bring order to that chaos. Sometimes it works, often it does not. The process is trance-like; there is an implied trust that in imperfection I can endure and find beauty.”

Judy Wise is an Oregon-based artist who has worked as a printmaker, painter, writer, and teacher for more than four decades. Wise’s painting process is characterized by instinctive brush work and mark making, where layers of paint and line are built up, occasionally covered over, sometimes scraped away, or washed out entirely. She also often grinds her own pigments from collected rocks and experiments with marble dust, wax, various paints, and textures. As a result, her canvases convey a sense of texture, spontaneity, and movement. Wise has exhibited extensively in Oregon and internationally.

**Title of Artwork Displayed: Gravity's Rainbow**



Format: Acrylic on canvas

Dimensions: 36 × 36 in. (91,4 × 91,4 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Canby, Oregon

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