



# Art in Embassies

U.S. DEPARTMENT *of* STATE

## Art in Embassies Exhibition: United States Embassy Port Louis

### 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.”

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## Welcome

They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters . . .

Every U.S. Ambassador has the privilege of hosting a temporary art exhibition supported by the Department of States's Office of Art in Embassies during their tenure. For the exhibition at our Residence, my wife, Kathleen, and I wanted to share paintings that captured common visual impressions reflective of Mauritius, Seychelles, and the United States. We felt particularly drawn to maritime imagery, considering the significant influence the sea has had on the histories and cultures of our nations. Those viewing the exhibition will be struck by how some paintings appear to be scenes from Mauritius or Seychelles but are, in fact, depictions from the United States. For example, the landscape in certain paintings could be mistaken for Flic en Flac or Beau Vallon beaches; they are, however, actually images of Miami beaches in the 1930s, painted by U.S. artist Reginald Marsh.

In addition, Kathleen and I share deep personal connections to the water growing up. Kathleen and her family are from the Tidewater region of Virginia, and she had grandparents who worked in the famous Newport News Shipyard. I grew up on a lake in New England and spent summers sailing on the Atlantic coast. These experiences had a lasting impact on both of us.

We also recognize that many people globally have their own connections with maritime environments, and that it is important to include diverse perspectives in this exhibit. Therefore, we were excited to include works from the Highwaymen — a group of self-taught African American painters from Florida. Without the benefit of formal training or established studios, these painters sold their artwork from the back of their cars to vacationing tourists traveling on the highways heading south to their beach holidays. Their art, in some ways, serves as a time capsule of post-war United States, capturing the nature of the southern coastal environment that has been quickly disappearing over the last few decades due to rapid development. The scenes of poinciana and palm trees along beaches and wetlands resemble the landscapes in Seychelles and Mauritius.

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One of the more striking works is the large oil on linen painting, *Las Terrenas Abstractions VII*, by New York-based, Dominican-born artist Julio Valdez. This iridescent painting captures the interplay between light and water, with subtle indication of a human silhouette. Writing of his work, the artist explains the water presents both a paradise and a prison:

“In the Caribbean region, the surrounding waters from the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea create a sense of light and space that are, at once, a blessing and a curse. The same beautiful waters that tourists enjoy as the illusion of paradise and freedom are also experienced as [a] natural ‘prison,’ a source of suffering, death, and pain for many natives, hoping to improve their lot while risking their lives as they flee their islands in fragile makeshift vessels. In my recent work, I am interested in creating a spatial uncertainty, a sense of time not yet defined.”

The exhibition features works by two notable female artists. One is an oil on canvas, expressionistic painting, *Florida Bayou and Pelicans*, by Alice Stanley Acheson, the late wife of former Secretary of State Dean Acheson. Another is a colorful lithograph, *Fisherman’s Wharf*, by Susan Pear Meisel.

Two larger pieces are *Inlet with Tree and Yellow Grass* and *Blue Boats at Dock* by Walter Elmer Schofield, a leading figure among the group of Pennsylvania Impressionists of the early twentieth century. It was noted regarding his work that he:

“... especially liked to paint on sunny days. Even in canvases where sunlight isn’t a tangible presence, it often might as well be, because the brightness of the colors and the clean delineations between objects give the illusion of light even when it’s not really there . . . He saw nature in bright colors — light greens, pale blues, intense whites dappled with gray shadows — and he never lost his sense of wonder at the beauty of the natural world. As he put it, ‘Nature is always vital, even in her implicit moods, and never denies a vision to the real lover.’”

Two pieces are by artists known for their use of bold color: Will Lee Atkyns Jr. and Tom Slaughter. Atkyns’ painting *Crab Houses, Weems, Virginia* evokes the small Virginia towns on the Chesapeake Bay, where Kathleen’s family is from, and reflects of the artist’s more natural,

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self-taught style. Tom Slaughter's screen print, *Summer 1992*, is indicative of his background as a graphic designer and illustrator.

Also of special note are a series of reproductions from the Mariners' Museum in Newport News, Virginia, an institution with one of the largest collections of nautical and maritime artifacts and art in the world. We have a personal connection with the museum; Kathleen served as an intern during her graduate studies at the College of William and Mary. The reproductions are paintings and prints of Mauritius and Seychelles that date from the early to late nineteenth century. Because of their fragile condition, the originals could not be brought here to Mauritius. The Mauritian prints are of areas around Port Louis (or its earlier name, Port Napoleon) and present bucolic scenes of Champs de Mars and panoramic views of a small Port Louis from Le Pouce.

The reproductions also include a painting from 1868 of Quarantine Island in Seychelles, which shows a group of liberated enslaved people who were rescued from enslavers by the HMS *Daphne*. The *Daphne* had been on an extended mission to interdict the illegal slave trade along the eastern African coast. The artist, Lt. William Henn, was posted as a sub-lieutenant on the *Daphne*. The Mariners Museum retains several paintings by Henn, showing scenes from his time aboard the *Daphne* (and other Royal Navy ships) chronicling the ship's mission in the 1860s.

These nineteenth-century images from Mauritius and Seychelles, preserved in a leading nautical institution in the United States, exemplify our shared connection with the sea, which transcends borders. We are linked by water, and how we engage with the environment, regardless of the medium we use, often echoes similar scenes and perspectives. While we bring our own experiences to our view of the world, I hope this Art in Embassies exhibition will foster a greater appreciation for common understanding of the environment and how it ultimately ties us together as one community.

Ambassador Henry V. Jardine  
Port Louis, Mauritius and the Seychelles  
June 2024

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## Artist Biographies

### Alice Stanley Acheson (1895-1996)

Alice Stanley Acheson's vivid, impressionistic oil paintings and watercolors convey a sense of spontaneity. She primarily painted landscapes, many depicting scenes of locations she visited with her husband, Dean Acheson, who served as Secretary of State under President Harry S. Truman. Acheson's mother was a watercolorist who encouraged her daughter to paint at a young age. She studied art at Wellesley College, Massachusetts, and exhibited extensively throughout the United States, including a solo exhibition at the Corcoran Gallery, Washington D.C.

#### Title of Artwork Displayed: Florida Bayou and Pelicans



Year Created: Undated

Format: Oil on canvas

Dimensions: 19 x 23 in (48,3 x 58,4 cm)

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Collection of Art in Embassies Washington, D.C.; Gift of Mrs. Walter C. Louchheim

## Willie Lee Atkyns Jr (1913-1987)

Willie Lee Atkyns Jr., known professionally as Lee Atkyns, was a self-taught painter, printmaker, sculptor, and educator. He was active in the Washington, D.C., arts scene, exhibiting his work frequently at galleries like the Arts Club of Washington. During the summers, he taught painting in rural areas of Pennsylvania. While Atkyns primarily preferred conventional subjects such as landscapes, urban scenes, and still lifes, his style evolved from a naturalistic approach toward broad simplification. Although *Crab Houses, Weems, Virginia* is undated, its pared-down geometric forms, dramatic spatial compression, and bold palette indicate the artist's mature period.

**Title of Artwork Displayed: Crab Houses, Weems, Virginia**



Year Created: Undated

Format: Oil on canvas on panel

Dimensions: 30 ½ x 35 ½ in (77,5 x 90,2 cm)

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Collection of Art in Embassies, Washington, D.C.; Gift of The Estate of Willie Lee Atkyns, Jr.

## **Reginald Marsh (1898-1954)**

Reginald Marsh was a painter, illustrator, and printmaker renowned for his lively depictions of burlesque shows, throngs of crowds at Coney Island, and bustling ship harbors. Although primarily known for his paintings of New York City (whose skyline is visible in the background of *RMS Queen Mary*), Marsh also documented his extensive travels throughout the United States and abroad. In the 1920s and 1930s, he traveled several times to Florida, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, focusing on idyllic views of foliage and architecture rather than gritty urban scenes. During this time, Marsh experimented with bright watercolor washes as he sought to capture the shifting light of tropical sunshine, as illustrated in *Palm Trees on Beach*, *Miami Beach*, and *Miami 1930*.

Born in Paris to artist parents, Marsh and his family immigrated to New Jersey when he was two years old. He graduated from Yale Art School, New Haven, Connecticut, and provided illustrations to many publications, including the *New Yorker*, the *New York Daily News*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Esquire*, and *Life*. His work is in the collections of such museums as the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; the Metropolitan Museum, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Museum of Modern Art, all in New York; and the Art Institute of Chicago, among many others.

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**Title of Artwork Displayed: Miami 1930**



Year Created: 1930

Format: Watercolor

Dimensions: 27 x 34 ¼ in (68,6 x 87 cm)

Collection of Art in Embassies, Washington, D.C.; Gift of William Benton

**Title of Artwork Displayed: Miami Beach**





Year Created: Undated

Format: Watercolor

Dimensions: 29 ¾ x 37 ¼ in (68,6 x 87 cm)

Collection of Art in Embassies, Washington, D.C.; Gift of William Benton

**Title of Artwork Displayed: RMS Queen Mary**



Year Created: 1936

Format: Watercolor

Dimensions: 31 ½ x 37 ½ in (80 x 95,3 cm)

Collection of Art in Embassies, Washington, D.C.; Gift of William Benton

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**Title of Artwork Displayed: Palm Trees on Beach**



Year Created: Undated

Format: Watercolor

Dimensions: 24 x 30 in (61 x 76,2 cm)

Collection of Art in Embassies, Washington, D.C.; Gift of William Benton

## **Susan Pear Meisel (born 1947)**

For over fifty years, Susan Pear Meisel has created whimsical scenes of landmarks in New York; Washington, D.C.; and other major cities. Her “use of ink and lines create[s] a playful layering within the composition.” Whether a print or silkscreen, “the inked hues carry their tonalities to the surface of the paper. The layering of multiple colors builds up a ground pattern that engages with one another in a vibrancy of color.” *Fisherman’s Wharf* shows San Francisco’s bustling northern waterfront beneath a yellow sky.

Meisel studied at the Art Students’ League, the School of Visual Arts, and the Parsons School of Design, all in New York. She helped open the Louis K. Meisel Gallery in New York’s Soho neighborhood, where it continues to exhibit original photorealist artists, realist painters, and

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sculptors. Her works are in the collections of the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, Connecticut; the Erie Art Museum, Pennsylvania; and the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

**Title of Artwork Displayed: Fisherman's Wharf**



Year Created: Undated

Format: Lithograph

Dimensions: 17 x 20 in. (43,2 x 50,8 cm)

Collection of Art in Embassies, Washington, D.C.; Gift of Sidney Meisel

**Sam Newton (born 1948)**

Sam Newton frequently paints larger compositions slower than his other Florida Highwaymen contemporaries to achieve a higher level of detail and a subtle blend of colors. Born in Tifton, Georgia, Sam is one of three Newton brothers — including Harold and Lemuel — who are members of the Highwaymen group. Denied access to Whites-only galleries, the Highwaymen — a group of twenty-six African American artists — sold their vibrant Florida landscapes directly

to tourists and businesses, often from the trunks of their cars. As the group grew, they learned painting techniques from one another, developing a quick, impressionistic method.

**Title of Artwork Displayed: Rio Mar Scene**



Year Created: Undated

Format: Oil on canvas board

Dimensions: 20 15/16 x 31 ½ in. (53,2 x 80 cm)

Courtesy of Antony Hayton, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

## **Livingston “Castro” Roberts (1942-2004)**

Livingston “Castro” Roberts was known for his meticulous detail, emotive rendering of colorful skies, and intense reflective bodies of water. He began painting at a young age, using leftover house paint to create his earliest works. As a seasoned artist, Roberts served as a mentor and teacher to younger members of the Florida Highwaymen. Of the twenty-six Highwaymen artists, Roberts is among the nine artists are considered the founders of the group that became famous for selling landscape canvases out of car trunks in the early 1950s when segregation laws prevented African Americans from selling in galleries.

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**Title of Artwork Displayed: Backwater Everglades Scene**



Year Created: Undated

Format: Oil on Upson board

Dimensions: 27 3/8 x 33 7/16 in. (69,6 x 85 cm)

Courtesy of Antony Hayton, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

## **Walter Elmer Schofield (1867-1944)**

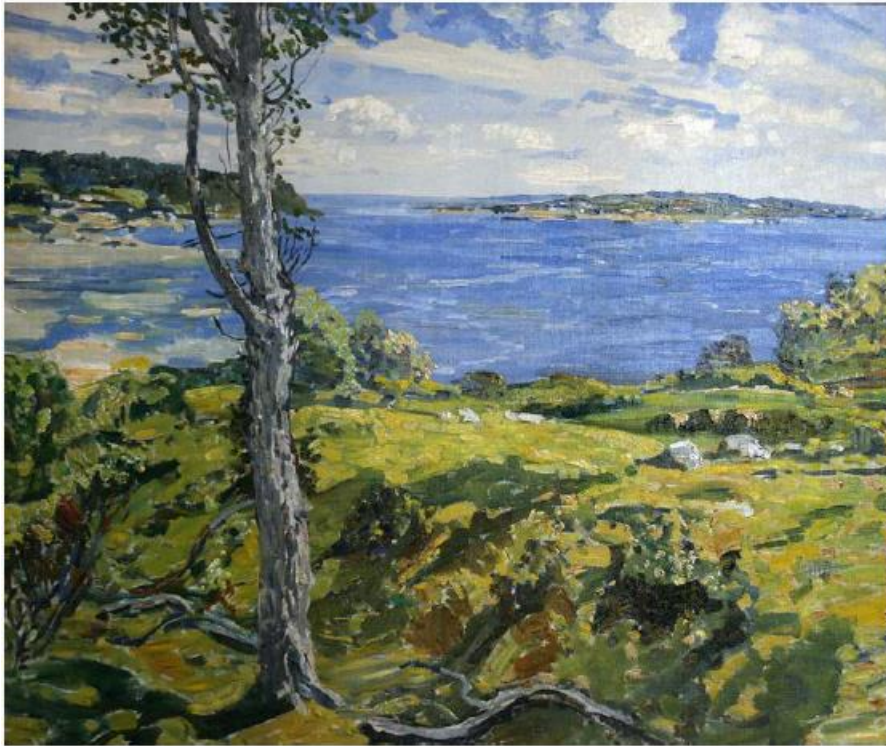
Walter Elmer Schofield was a late nineteenth-century landscape painter known for showcasing bold colors using broad, thick brushstrokes. Born into a wealthy Philadelphia family, he attended the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and later studied at the Académie Julian in Paris. While in France, Schofield was inspired by the impressionists' practice of painting *en plein air*, or outdoors. He went on to consistently create amongst nature throughout his career, even in the harshest weather conditions.

Schofield received wide acclaim and accolades throughout his lifetime. His work is included in many public collections, including the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C.;

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the Art Institute of Chicago; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

**Title of Artwork Displayed: Inlet with Tree and Yellow Grass**



Year Created: Undated

Format: Oil on canvas

Dimensions: 35 ½ x 41 ½ in. (90,2 x 105,4 cm)

Collection of Art in Embassies, Washington, D.C.; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Philip Berman

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**Title of Artwork Displayed: Blue Boats at Dock**



Year Created: Undated

Format: Oil on board

Dimensions: 29 ½ x 33 ½ in. (74,9 x 85,1 cm)

Collection of Art in Embassies, Washington, D.C.; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Philip Berman

**Tom Slaughter (1955-2014)**

“Icons...these are my alphabet. I draw them over and over until they are part of my language. Sunglasses, bikes, hats, boats, buildings...they are all just part of an excuse to make images.”

Tom Slaughter was a painter and illustrator best known for his vibrant, playful style characterized by bright, primary colors and bold lines. His works typically present objects and

scenes from the artist's life in New York and coastal Long Island. He attended Connecticut College, where he majored in art history. His work is in the collections of such institutions as the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art, both in New York; and the British Museum, London. *Summer 1992* belongs to a series of prints Slaughter created to commemorate his seasonal visits to southern Ontario with his wife and children.

**Title of Artwork Displayed: Summer 1992**



Year Created: 1993

Format: Multicolored screen print

Dimensions: 27 ½ x 19 ½ in. (69,9 x 49,5 cm)

Collection of Art in Embassies, Washington, D.C.; Gift of the Foundation for Art and Preservation in Embassies, Washington, D.C.

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## Julio Valdez (born 1969)

Julio Valdez is a painter, printmaker, and installation artist whose work evokes his Afro-Caribbean roots, childhood memories, and contemporary issues of displacement and cultural identity. Water is the central recurring motif through which he explores these themes, often encompassing the entire visual field of his large-scale compositions. Valdez explains that he employs an “all over” method, with careful attention to transparency, color saturation, and luminosity, to convey a feeling of being immersed in the ocean. *Las Terrenas Abstractions VII* depicts the artist’s son submerged in the Atlantic Ocean near the Dominican Republic’s northeastern coast.

Born and raised in Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic, Valdez studied at the National School of Fine Arts and graduated from the Altos de Chavón School of Design. He relocated to New York in 1993 and received a fellowship from the Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop the following year. His work is in many public collections, including El Museo del Barrio, New York; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Museum of Latin American Art, Long Beach, California; and the Museo de Arte Moderno, Santa Domingo, the Dominican Republic.

### Title of Artwork Displayed: *Las Terrenas Abstractions VII*



Year Created: 2018-2019

Format: Oil on linen

Dimensions: 56 x 76 in. (137,2 x 193 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, New York

## George Cooke (1781-1834)

**Title of Artwork Displayed: View of Port Napoleon, Isle of France**



Year Created: 1813

Format: Digital reproduction of engraving published by Longman, Hurst, Reese, Orme & Brown

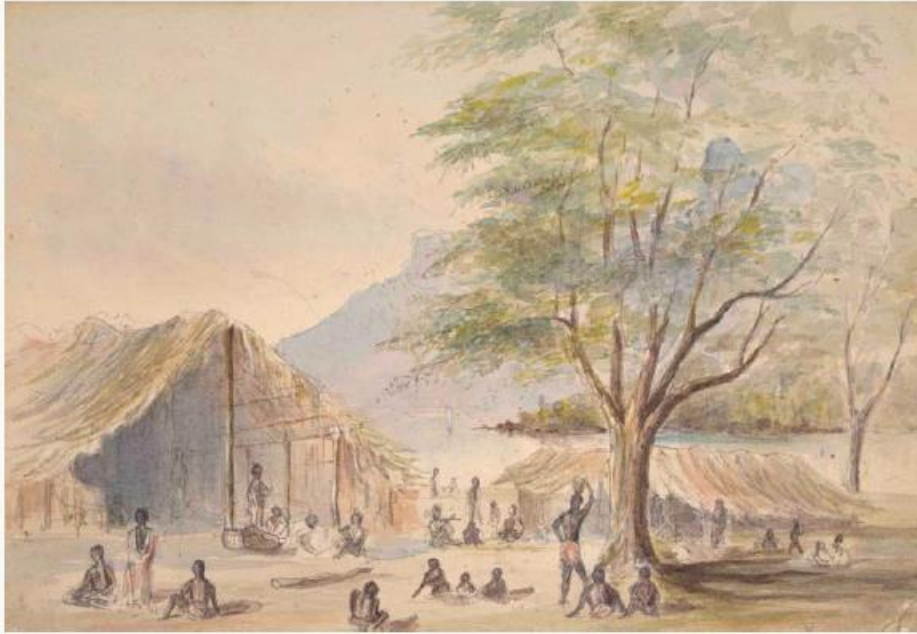
Dimensions: 16 x 20 in. (40,6 x 50,8 cm)

Courtesy of The Mariners' Museum and Park, Newport News, Virginia

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## Lieutenant William Henn (1847-1894)

Title of Artwork Displayed: Quarantine Island, Seychelles, "Daphne"



Year Created: 1868

Format: Digital reproduction of watercolor

Dimensions: 16 x 20 in. (40,6 x 50,8 cm)

Courtesy of The Mariners' Museum and Park, Newport News, Virginia

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## Artist Unknown

**Title of Artwork Displayed: Mauritius from the "Pouce"**



Year Created: 1856

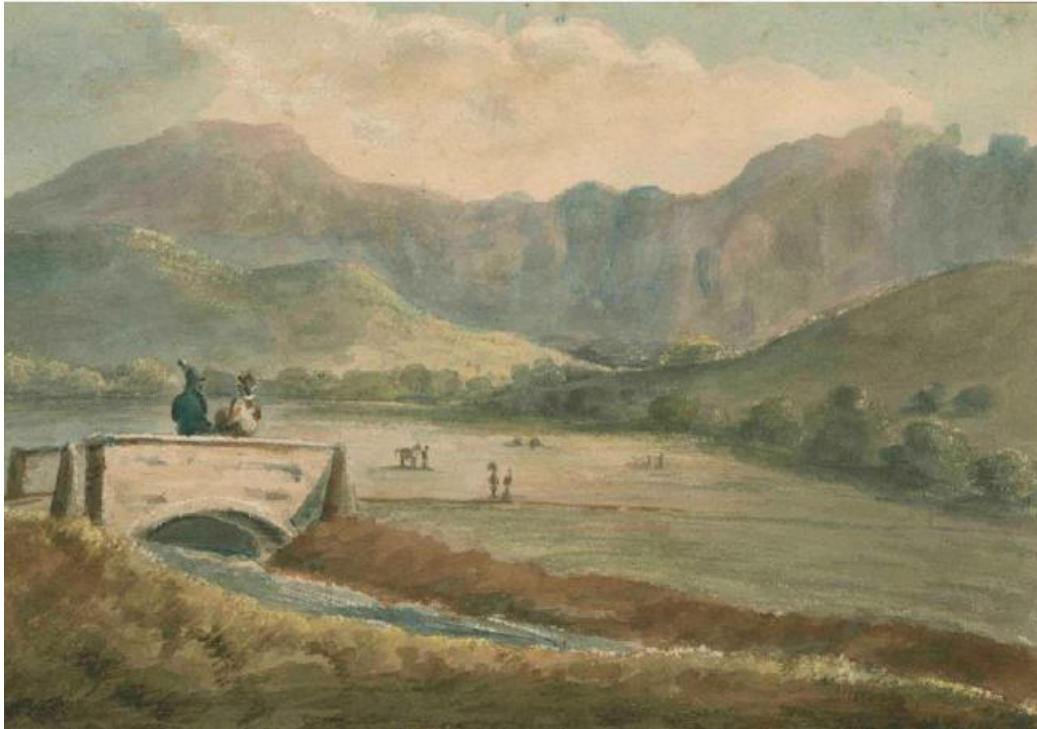
Format: Digital reproduction of color lithograph. P.S. Duval & Co.'s Lith. Philadelphia

Dimensions: 16 x 20 in. (40,6 x 50,8 cm)

Courtesy of The Mariners' Museum and Park, Newport News, Virginia

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**Title of Artwork Displayed: "Champs de Mars, Port Louis, Isle of France, Mauritius"**



Year Created: ca. 1800-1825

Format: Digital reproduction of watercolor

Dimensions: 16 x 20 in. (40,6 x 50,8 cm)

Courtesy of The Mariners' Museum and Park, Newport News, Virginia

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**Title of Artwork Displayed: “Champs de Mars, Port Louis, Isle of France, Mauritius”**



Year Created: ca. 1800-1825

Format: Digital reproduction of watercolor

Dimensions: 16 x 20 in. (40,6 x 50,8 cm)

Courtesy of The Mariners' Museum and Park, Newport News, Virginia

## **Acknowledgements**

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