



Art in Embassies

U.S. DEPARTMENT *of* STATE

Art in Embassies Exhibition: United States Embassy Cotonou

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

Welcome

Welcome to the Residence of the Ambassador of the United States to the Republic of Benin! In other words, welcome to the home of the American people in Cotonou, where Clare and I have been enjoying our second time together in a country which boasts its own rich cultural and artistic heritage. The theme for our Residence's art exhibition is "The Northeast"—a place where we associate many happy memories and consider to be our other home.

Cotonou has changed since we were last here—it is a more modern city now, but it still boasts natural splendor, including in our garden. The paintings provided by generous lenders and Art in Embassies highlight the natural beauty of the Northeastern United States, and we believe that this art pairs well with the Residence's serene garden.

In fact, as we invite you into our home, one of the first items you will see is Barbara Cirioni's painting, *My Sister's Garden*—which the mirror in the entryway reflects. Like me, the artist is from Massachusetts. Her energetic and layered color-building captures a sense of exuberance for gardening and life.

Clare's favorite piece also exhibits a three-dimensional or tactile quality. Ronni Jolles developed *Winter Reds* using handmade papers collected from around the world that, as the artist says, are "cut, torn, and layered to create uniquely textured scenes."

Perhaps one of the most striking works, though, is an oil triptych. Lynne Friedman's *Before, During, After* draws people inside to the living room where they can examine the vivid colors on three panels that showcase a changing environment.

Barbara Hocker's photographs, Patricia Busso's oil and encaustic paintings, and Janet Siefert's acrylic paintings reflect the colors of the passing of the seasons across the Northeast, bringing our home in the United States to our home in Benin.

We extend our thanks to Art in Embassies for connecting us with these talented artists, to the artists themselves for their generosity in loaning their work—and also to you, for taking the

time to visit with us and enjoy this art. After all, art creates a connection to places, history, and hope for the future. Art, as a form of freedom of expression, can transcend languages and borders and create a sense of community. We hope that you will enjoy our exhibition and reflect on what makes you happy in your own home.

Ambassador Brian Shukan and Blare Shukan

Cotonou, Benin

July 2024

Artist Biographies

Patricia Busso

Patricia Busso discovered painting when her camera broke on an artists' retreat, so instead, she spent the month layering acrylics on found wood. She says that both painting and photography require the maker and the viewer to take time to absorb the natural world and reflect on its beauty, geometry, and color. Busso has since moved from acrylics to oils; her primary medium of choice is encaustic, a process that "involves melting the beeswax-based paint, applying it, then fusing it with a torch to bond it to the panel's surface. Once cured, the surface can be buffed with a cloth to create an enamel-like finish."

Massachusetts-based Busso describes *A Touch of Gray* as "one of those pieces informed by the haphazard fields of color which made up the underpainting. This often gets obliterated, but sometimes the colors and forms I use to wipe out the white of a primed panel surprisingly end up largely dictating the finished piece." The artist is fascinated by how different marshes can appear based on the season or time of day, which allows her to revisit them time and time again, as in *Great Marsh Winter*.

Title of Artwork Displayed: A Touch of Gray



Year Created: 2020

Format: Oil on wood

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

Courtesy of the artist, Boston, Massachusetts

Title of Artwork Displayed: Great Marsh Winter



Year Created: 2021

Format: Encaustic on wood

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

Courtesy of the artist, Boston, Massachusetts

George Edwin Chaplin (born 1931)

“I see color as light and atmosphere and celebrate it for its emotional impact and beauty. The changeable nature of color, both intrinsically and from external conditions, fascinates me, and I am particularly involved in how it can appear to alternately expand and contract.”

George Edwin Chaplin studied at the Yale School of Art in New Haven, Connecticut, where he earned both Bachelor of Fine Arts and Master of Fine Arts degrees. His paintings—abstract and based on color studies—are included in museum collections throughout the United States. As a color field painter, Chaplin blurs not only foreground and background but the colors themselves, creating tension and vibration. “Although he runs through the spectrum of what

we usually think of as warm and cool colors, none of Chaplin's colors are really cool...The color fills the room, vibrates, and seems to fluctuate as if moved by currents of air."

Title of Artwork Displayed: Autumnal



Year Created: undated

Format: Pastel

Dimensions: 32 ½ x 42 ½ in. (82,6 x 108 cm)

Collection of Art in Embassies, Washington, D.C.

Title of Artwork Displayed: Peach Suffusion



Year Created: undated

Format: Pastel

Dimensions: 33 x 42 ¾ in. (83,8 x 108,6 cm)

Collection of Art in Embassies, Washington, D.C.

Brenda Cironi

“My newest abstractions are inspired by gardening: spring energy, summertime fun, and heat. Visiting my sister’s gardens in Maine is a delight for all my senses and an inspiration for my paintings. She is an inspired gardener. *My Sister’s Garden* reflects my love of color, gardening, and life in general.”

New England-based Brenda Cironi studied at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Her paintings begin with instinct, layered color building until she establishes a dialogue with the surface and an image begins to evolve. “I give my instincts free rein to explore the canvas, and soon...a garden blooms or a landscape appears. After all these years, I still find this so exciting!” she says of her process. Her work has been exhibited in museums and galleries across the United States.

Title of Artwork Displayed: *My Sister’s Garden*



Year Created: 2020

Format: Acrylic on canvas

Dimensions: 40 x 36 in. (101,6 x 91,4 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Maynard, Massachusetts

Lynne Friedman (born 1945)

Lynne Friedman “interprets the shimmering natural world in oil, watercolor, and mixed media collage paintings. Living in the Hudson Valley, her focus is on exploring the land’s magic, plant and flower growth, and often suggests an ecological message.” Friedman describes the *Before, During, After* triptych as a work that explores “the evolution of the earth: the primordial oceans, evolving modern technology and challenges of a changing environment.”

New York native Friedman’s work has been shown in solo exhibitions across the northern hemisphere and is held in private collections around the world. Friedman received a Bachelor of Arts degree and Master of Fine Arts degree in art from Queens College and a Doctor of Education degree from Columbia University, both in New York. She also studied at the New York Studio School.

Title of Artwork Displayed: *Before, During, After*



Year Created: 2019

Format: Oil on three panels

Dimensions: 24 x 72 in., each panel 24 x 24 in. (61 x 182,9 cm, each panel 61 x 61 cm)

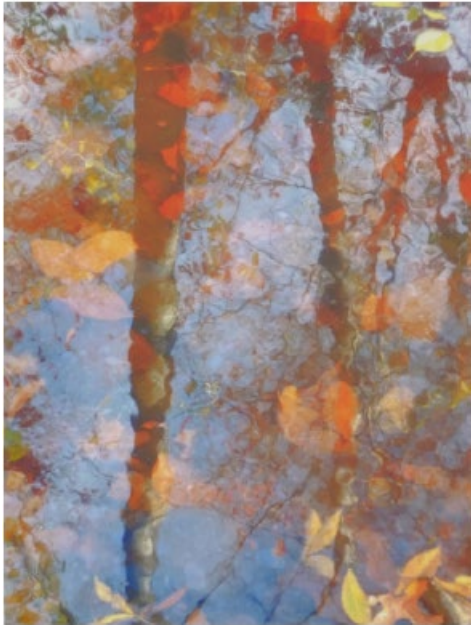
Courtesy of the artist, Kingston, New York

Barbara Hocker

“This pair of *Water Mirror* pieces explores the complexity of space in a still pool of water in the Connecticut woods. The photographs capture the reflections of the autumn trees [from] above the water mingled with the fallen leaves floating on the surface and the river stones glimpsed below the surface of the water. The ambiguity of space means that you can notice different nuances every time you look at the pieces.”

Barbara Hocker is a Connecticut-based mixed-media artist living between the beach and saltwater marsh, her life organized by the tides. For decades, Hocker has focused on expressing tranquility, ephemerality, and meditation in her artwork, with trees and water as her subject. She combines digital photographs with other media creating works on paper, panels, handmade books, and installations. Hocker studied fibers at Syracuse University in New York and Cranbrook Academy of Arts in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.

Title of Artwork Displayed: Water Mirror VI



Year Created: 2015

Format: Photographs printed on frosted matte film with additional colored pencil

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

Courtesy of the artist, Hartford, Connecticut

Title of Artwork Displayed: Water Mirror VII



Year Created: 2015

Format: Photographs printed on frosted matte film with additional colored pencil

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

Courtesy of the artist, Hartford, Connecticut

Ronni Jolles

“I began as a collage artist, but I wanted more textures in my work. I began to explore the world of handmade papers, and I found that villages in many different countries around the world make beautiful papers. I began to gather papers from these countries, including Thailand, Nepal, Tibet, Egypt, Mexico, India, the Philippines, Japan, Italy, and France, to name a few... After years of trial and error, I have created a process that has both expanded, and defined, over time. Papers from all over the world are cut, torn, and layered to create uniquely textured scenes.”

Ronni Jolles is a Washington, D.C.-area artist, now creating fulltime after teaching art for many years. She double majored in art and psychology at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. As a teacher, Jolles worked with photography, drawing, painting, and wood carving, but

professionally she chose her tactile side, focusing on collage and paper-making. She has shown her work in galleries and art spaces throughout the country and continues to be an active member of the D.C. art scene.

Title of Artwork Displayed: Winter Reds



Year Created: 2021

Format: Layered paper & acrylic

Dimensions: 21 x 27 in. (53,3 x 68,6 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Chevy Chase, Maryland

Janet Seifert

“As an artist, I often look to the skies for inspiration, where the seasons and changing weather are written. *Vernal Equinox*, one of a series, expresses the beauty and wonder of that whole other amazing world above our heads.”

Abstract artist Janet Seifert creates luminous, intuitive paintings and drawings that capture imagined moments of the unexpected beauty transcending everyday life. A native of Baltimore, she studied studio art and art history at the University of Maryland College Park. After a long career as a graphic designer and naming consultant, she returned to painting and drawing. While living in San Francisco, Seifert exhibited her works in venues around the Bay Area and beyond. Now having returned to her home state of Maryland, she exhibits regionally, and her art is found in collections around the world.

Title of Artwork Displayed: Vernal Equinox



Year Created: 2018

Format: Acrylic painting on archival paper

Dimensions: 30 x 38 in. (76,2 x 96,5 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Frederick, Maryland

Acknowledgements

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