



Art in Embassies

U.S. DEPARTMENT *of* STATE

Art in Embassies Exhibition: United States Embassy Bratislava

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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Ambassador's Statement

Welcome to the home of the United States Ambassador to Slovakia. We feel privileged to be sharing our love of art with you. Selecting works of art for the Ambassador's Residence in Bratislava was a thoughtful process. We wanted our guests to feel a connection to these pieces as we open our home to artists and their works that highlight both American and Slovak heritage and our shared ties.

My family comes from different cultural backgrounds, and our diversity is emblematic of America. We purposefully selected artwork to reflect our histories, which we believe also mirrors the American experience and the progress we have made as a nation. As the U.S. Ambassador to Slovakia, I also wanted to take this once in a lifetime opportunity to highlight some magnificent Slovak artists.

From historical photographs by and of people of color, through landscapes and abstract paintings by American artists and young up-and-coming Slovak painters, to distinctive works by well-known artists from both sides of the ocean—we wanted to feature the stories and people of all backgrounds. This is purposefully an eclectic exhibition, giving us an opportunity to celebrate diversity and originality.

I am grateful to the talented artists who have allowed us to share their amazing work with all of you. I want to particularly thank the Art in Embassies staff for their efforts, the teachers and students of the Academy of Fine Arts for the opportunity to highlight paintings by the upcoming generation of Slovak artists, and the Slovak National Gallery for allowing us to share from their archives pieces of Slovakia's rich history.

Enjoy the exhibition!

Ambassador Gautam Rana

Bratislava, Slovakia

September 2024

Artist Biographies

Brenda Berkman (born 1951)

After serving New York for twenty-five years as one of the city's first female firefighters, Brenda Berkman turned her attention to art during retirement. Despite her initial unfamiliarity with drawing or printmaking, she began taking courses at the Art Students League of New York. She began with block prints and then focused on stone lithography and etching. Her practice served, in part, as a form of therapy, having spent two months aiding in the Ground Zero recovery operations and losing many friends and colleagues in the September 11 terrorist attacks. *The Statue of Liberty's Gaze* belongs to her *Thirty-Six Views of One World Trade Center* series, which commemorates the fifteenth anniversary of the attacks and documents the rebuilding of lower Manhattan.

Berkman received a bachelor's degree from St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota; a master's degree from Indiana University, Bloomington; and a law degree from New York University. In 1982, she won a landmark sex discrimination case against the New York City Fire Department to become a firefighter. She also serves on the board of directors of Monumental Women, an organization dedicated to honoring women and people of color in public spaces. In 2016, the National September 11 Memorial & Museum acquired one of Berkman's three original portfolios of prints for their permanent collection.

Title of Artwork Displayed: The Statue of Liberty's Gaze



Year Created: 2013

Format: Stone Lithograph

Dimensions: 11 x 15 in (27,9 x 38,1 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, New York, New York

Brennan Gilmore (born 1979)

Brennan Gilmore's portfolio includes images of such celestial phenomena as galaxies, nebulae, and comets. He began pursuing astrophotography in the summer of 2020, at a time when Comet Neowise passed through the inner solar system. Inspired by this rare occurrence, Gilmore began studying how to effectively capture the comet's journey in the night sky. These photographs require long exposure times and using algorithms to stitch more than one hundred images together to reveal their interstellar subjects. At the same time, Gilmore explains that his favorite images contain aspects of the celestial and the terrestrial, as they "remind viewers that our home on this planet is just a small part of a much larger, deeply interconnected cosmic system."

Gilmore, a native of Lexington, Virginia, graduated from the University of Virginia, Charlottesville. For fifteen years, he was a member of the U.S. Foreign Service, focusing on human rights, humanitarian affairs, and conflict

resolution in Africa and the Middle East.

Title of Artwork Displayed: Rho Ophiuchi over Balance Rock, Big Bend



Year Created: 2022

Format: Color photograph print

Dimensions: 22 x 17 in. (55,9 x 43,2 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Keswick, Virginia

Title of Artwork Displayed: Comet Neowise over Goshen Pass



Year Created: 2020

Format: Color photograph print

Dimensions: 22 x 17 in. (55,9 x 43,2 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Keswick, Virginia

Title of Artwork Displayed: Buck Moon over Jefferson Memorial



Year Created: 2021

Format: Color photograph print

Dimensions: 17 x 22 in. (43,2 x 55,9 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Keswick, Virginia

Lewis Hine (1874-1940)

Lewis Hine's unique blend of artistic expression and advocacy played a significant role in the evolution of documentary photography within the United States. His documentary photographs poignantly captured the plight of children working in farms, mills, and factories, which helped effect change to labor laws. As part of an active community of reformers, he was often called upon to record diverse social issues. For example, while employed as a teacher at New York's progressive Ethical Culture School, Hine was commissioned to photograph immigrants passing through Ellis Island. Between 1904 and 1909, he shot more than two hundred photographs of individuals and families arriving at the port and awaiting processing. In the wake of rising xenophobia, Hine sought to humanize these immigrants through carefully composed images and captions detailing their lives, often with a subjective flourish. *Joys and Sorrow at Ellis Island's* caption reads, "A group of Slavic immigrants register many shades of emotion. The baby salutes his new home—quite a family group."

Hine was born in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, where he attended university extension courses in sociology. Throughout his career, he worked for groups that championed various progressive social causes, including the National Child Labor Committee, the American Red Cross, the American Clothing Workers, and the Tenement House Commission.

Title of Artwork Displayed: Joys and Sorrows at Ellis Island



Year Created: 1905

Format: Photographic print

Dimensions: 16 x 18 ¼ in. (40,6 x 46,4 cm)

Collection of Art in Embassies, Washington, D.C.; and the New York Public Library, Photography Collection, New York

Caroline Kent (born 1968)

Caroline Kent synthesizes irregular shapes, bold lines, and pattern to create a wholly personal and unique abstract idiom. She employs a black gesso background for most of her works, upon which she intuitively layers floating collage-like forms and markings which vary in texture and size. A female artist of African American and Mexican descent, Kent's practice seeks to reclaim abstract art, a genre that was historically dominated by white men. She extends this spirit of inclusivity to the viewer, stating, "I was interested in creating a visual, abstract language where everyone had the same capability for access. Just because I am the 'inventor' of it doesn't mean that I alone hold the keys to its translation."

Kent received a Bachelor of Science degree from Illinois State University, Normal, and a Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. She is the recipient of such

honors as the Joan Mitchell Foundation Award for Painters & Sculptors and the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant. Kent's work is included in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Art Institute of Chicago; the New Orleans Museum of Art; and the Dallas Museum of Art. Kent is an assistant professor of painting at the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois.

Title of Artwork Displayed: More questions than answers



Year Created: 2017

Format: Acrylic on paper

Dimensions: 32 ½ x 25 in. (82,6 x 63,5 cm)

Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York

Martin Knut (born 1964)

Martin Knut's work is inspired by children's stories and his own mythology. His paintings tell intimate micro-stories that bear traces of memory, characterized by emblems and symbols on monochrome surfaces, created through a sophisticated and meditative manipulation of space, line, surface, and color.

Knut studied architecture and painting at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava. He was a part of the young generation of neoexpressive painters who ushered in the postmodern program and a member of the group Syzygia (with Gabriel Hošovský, Miloš Novák, and Rudolf Sikora) and Trojštít (with Laco Teren and Ivan Csudai).

Title of Artwork Displayed: On a Horse



Year Created: 1991

Format: Acrylic on canvas

Dimensions: 71 x 86 ½ in. (180 x 220 cm)

Courtesy of Slovak National Gallery, Inventory No. O 6668, Bratislava, Slovakia

Milan Láluha (1930-2013)

Painter Milan Láluha helped revive the tradition of interwar modernism, the aim of which was to represent Slovakia's national character. Inspired by principles of Cubofuturism, his work largely consists of stylized forms of fiery color enclosed in sharp linear contours. Through the synthesis of expressive color and rational composition, he visualized the pride of the Slovakian national idea.

Láluha studied at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava and was a co-founder of the Mikuláš Galanda Group. He won the Osvaldo Licini Award at the 1966 Venice Biennale.

Title of Artwork Displayed: Conversation



Year Created: 1965

Format: Oil on canvas

Dimensions: 24 x 35 ½ in. (61,4 x 90,3 cm)

Courtesy of Slovak National Gallery, Inventory No. O 3287, Bratislava, Slovakia

Ester Martinčeková-Šimerová (1909-2005)

Ester Martinčeková-Šimerová's avant-garde paintings blend aspects of cubist abstraction and flat, decorative detail. Her innovative and unorthodox efforts to connect the worlds of civilization and nature have resulted in a dynamic and precisely mastered modernist form.

Martinčeková-Šimerová studied in Paris at the Académie Julian and the Académie Moderne, and she also took private classes with Alexandra Exterová. She spent most of her life in Liptovský Mikuláš in northern Slovakia.

Title of Artwork Displayed: In Factory Town



Year Created: 1971

Format: Oil on canvas

Dimensions: 31 ¼ x 25 in. (79,5 x 64 cm)

Courtesy of Slovak National Gallery, Inventory No. O 4025, Bratislava, Slovakia

Bryce Mironuck (born 1985)

Born and raised in Canada, Bryce Mironuck’s love of photography arose from shooting the pristine night sky. Since then, his photographic journeys have taken him to many places across Canada, the United States, and South America. He strives to elicit a strong emotional response from the viewer by creating “painterly” photographs that encompass a wide range of scenarios and color, particularly in nature. *Fanning the Flames* depicts a Japanese maple tree in Portland, Oregon, in a stunning rainbow palette, shot from an angle that highlights the leaves wrapping around the base of its canopy. Mironuck visited the tree numerous times, often in rainy conditions, to capture the perfect spectrum of color. When he is not shooting photographs, Mironuck works as a website designer and developer.

Title of Artwork Displayed: Fanning the Flames



Year Created: 2019

Format: Color photograph

Dimensions: 40 x 60 in. (101,6 x 152,4 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada

Ela Shah

Born in Mumbai, India, Ela Shah weaves together traditional Indian motifs and images from American popular culture in her multimedia practice. After moving to the United States with her young family in the 1970s, Shah contended with the tension between the expectations of being a traditional homemaker and her desire to create art. Amid the challenge of acclimating to a new language and culture, Shah took art classes at Montclair State University, New Jersey, where she began to experiment with clay and bronze sculpture. Since then, she has created brightly colored works that address religious, political, and cultural issues in our globalized society.

Shah received a master's degree in sculpture at Montclair State University. Her work has been exhibited in solo and group shows in the United States and abroad at such venues as the Museum of Modern Arts, New Delhi; the Queens Museum, New York; and the Newark Museum, New Jersey. She has received numerous awards and fellowships, including awards

from the National Association of Women Artists, New York, and the New Jersey Innovative Printmaking Fellowship at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Title of Artwork Displayed: Power of Women



Year Created: 2002

Format: Mixed media on print

Dimensions: 27 x 23 in. (68,6 x 58,4 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Clifton, New Jersey

Title of Artwork Displayed: Rejuvenation



Year Created: 2023

Format: Giclee print

Dimensions: 38 x 26 in. (96,5 x 66 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Clifton, New Jersey

Ján Vasilko (born 1979)

Ján Vasilko paints large canvases with tower-like forms and constructions reminiscent of industrial waste. His works bring traditional European styles into the present day, ambiguously commenting on modern culture—some paintings evoke feelings of nostalgia and sadness but are filled with absurd humor.

Vasilko studied at the Faculty of Arts of the Technical University in Košice, Slovakia, and completed an internship at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava and the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. He has won several prestigious awards and represents the outstanding talents of the young artistic generation in Slovakia.

Title of Artwork Displayed: Iron Party



Year Created: 2005

Format: Acrylic on canvas

Dimensions: 55 x 86 ½ in. (140 x 200 cm)

Courtesy of Slovak National Gallery, Inventory No. O 6940, Bratislava, Slovakia

Elena Volkova (born 1975)

Elena Volkova is an interdisciplinary artist, educator, and curator whose creative practice uses historical and contemporary photographic techniques to explore complex themes of domesticity, liminality, and subjective experience. Shot with a telephoto lens, *Untitled* is from a series of photographs the artist took around her neighborhood in Baltimore during the COVID-19 pandemic quarantine: “I wanted to learn how natural forms juxtaposed with light—both natural and artificial—can lead me onto an escapist journey where I find poetic moments among the chaos that is happening in the world.”

Ukrainian-born Volkova received both her Bachelor of Fine Arts and Master of Fine Arts degrees from the Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore. She has exhibited her work nationally and internationally and has received several recognitions and awards, including the Maryland State Arts Council Creativity Grant. Volkova has been a social practice resident artist at the Maryland Center for History and Culture and the Anacostia Arts Center. She teaches photography at Stevenson University in Baltimore.

Title of Artwork Displayed: Untitled



Year Created: 2020

Format: Color photograph

Dimensions: 24 x 34 in. (61 x 86,4 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Baltimore, Maryland

Anonymous

New York – Welcome to the land of freedom – An ocean steamer passing the Statue of Liberty: Scene on the steerage deck / from a sketch by a staff artist is from a wood engraving made by an unknown artist associated with *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, or *Leslie's Weekly*. The artwork depicts people onboard the steamer *Germanic* standing on the steerage deck, with the iconic Statue of Liberty in New York City in the background, possibly marking their first encounter with the United States.

From 1855 to 1922, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* operated as an illustrated literary and news publication. It earned a successful readership due to its nonpartisan yet sensational coverage of American current events, including John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, the Spanish-American War, and World War I. Founded by British American engraver and publisher Frank Leslie, the weekly publication first illustrated woodcuts and daguerreotypes before featuring photography. Notable American artist Norman Rockwell worked for the magazine.

Title of Artwork Displayed: New York – Welcome to the land of freedom – An ocean steamer passing the Statue of Liberty: Scene on the steerage deck / from a sketch by a staff artist



Year Created: created 1887; reprinted 2023

Format: Digital reproduction of a wood engraving

Dimensions: 15 x 18 in. (38,1 x 45,7 cm)

Collection of Art in Embassies, Washington, D.C.; Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

Photographer Unknown

This photograph shows two pioneering figures of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, Rosa Parks and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., around the time of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, a thirteen-month nonviolent protest that ended with the Supreme Court ruling segregation on public buses unconstitutional—*Browder v. Gayle* (1956). The protest—sparked by Parks’s arrest after she refused to give up her seat to a White passenger— was largely planned and executed by The Women’s Political Council, an organization of Black women active in anti-segregation activities and politics in Alabama. The boycott also launched King to international prominence as a leader of civil disobedience. On the boycott’s first day, December 5, 1955, before a crowd of more than five thousand Black citizens at Montgomery’s Holt Street Baptist Church, King delivered an impassioned speech, stating, in part: “We, the disinherited of this land, we who have been oppressed so long, are tired of going through the long night of captivity. And now we are reaching out for the daybreak of freedom and justice and equality.”

Title of Artwork Displayed: Photograph of Rosa Parks with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr



Year Created: circa 1965

Format: Digital reproduction of black and white photograph

Dimensions: 15 x 18 in. (38,1 x 45,7 cm)

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