



Art in Embassies

U.S. DEPARTMENT *of* STATE

Art in Embassies Exhibition: United States Embassy Vientiane

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 U.S. Ambassador's Residence in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR)! It is an exciting time to live in this home—which has been the Ambassador's Residence for decades—at a time when we are preparing to celebrate seventy-five years since the United States established diplomatic relations with Laos on July 29, 1950.

As someone who has loved the textile arts since my mother taught me to embroider as a child, I was delighted to find the legendary Carol Cassidy's work already here, in the Residence. Many thanks to Carol for letting us keep her *Totem I Naga (Ban Keune)* and her *Totem II Naga (Ban Keune)* in this exhibition. To complement these beautiful pieces of Lao weaving, I decided to highlight the quintessentially American art of quilting, and it is wonderful to have *Drawing Sessions: Dogwood* and *Botanical* by Astrid Hilger Bennett, who is from my home state of Iowa. Many thanks to my aunt, Margaret Dull, who donated one of her quilted pieces for me to display alongside this Art in Embassies exhibition. I also have some very special pieces of embroidery in my personal art collection stitched by my mother, Catherine Roach, and me, including a sampler made by my mother on the occasion of my wedding. Samplers, like quilting, are another unique American textile art.

The landscape of Laos, with the mighty Mekong River and fertile rice paddies, reminds me in some ways of the landscape of Iowa, where I grew up, including along the Mississippi River and among the fields of corn. I am especially grateful to Fred Easker for loaning his *Winter River Morning* to this exhibition; I have long admired Fred's landscapes, which capture the beauty of the American Midwest. Similarly, it is wonderful to have Kristin Lansing-Stoeffler's *The Spaces Between* in this exhibition; her style, and paintings from my personal collection by Marcia Wegman and Gordon Kellenberger, remind me of the famous American regionalist painters from Iowa, Grant Wood and Marvin Cone. Coming full circle, Nancy Purington's *FLAME STITCH ICE & SNOW* captures both the Mississippi River as it flows through Iowa and a textile pattern.

Gregor Turk's fascination with topography echoes my fascination with the Mekong and Mississippi Rivers. His *Topo Slabs* and *Shift #8* add texture and dimension to this exhibition. I will be forever grateful to Chris and Dani Dumm here at Embassy Vientiane for suggesting I incorporate the work of U.S. artists with ties to Laos and for working with KaYing Yang, a

member of President Biden's Advisory Commission on Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders, to point me toward Hmong American artist Yer Za Vue. Her *Oregon Wildflowers* ties into my love of landscapes, and *The Pearl* symbolizes for me the people of both Laos and the United States.

Thank you to the Art in Embassies team at the State Department for helping me assemble this exhibition that captures the many ways in which I am honored to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to the Lao PDR. And a special thank you to the General Services and Facilities teams at Embassy Vientiane for bringing this exhibition to Laos.

Ambassador Heather Variava
Vientiane, Laos

Artist Biographies

Astrid Hilger Bennett

Astrid Hilger Bennett's abstract textile works are inspired by nature and Chinese, Korean, and Japanese brushwork traditions. "In daily life, I practice active listening and observation. So, while my work does not tell stories, it is a reflection of deeply immersive observations and preverbal experiences. I am committed to sustainability and social justice issues, as well as mentoring and giving back. When possible, I create work that has a dual purpose as both wall and functional art," she says.

Bennett developed an interest in fiber art and "making things" as a child, and she later earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in printmaking from Indiana University. A cultural and small business advocate, Bennett has served as longtime manager, marketing director, and owner of the Iowa Artisans Gallery in Iowa City. She has also been president of the Surface Design Association, an international textile nonprofit organization that facilitates the exchange of ideas, methods, and materials in the fiber art world.

Title of Artwork Displayed: Drawing Session: Dogwood



Year Created: 2015

Format: Hand painted, monoprint cotton broadcloth, stitched fiber

Dimensions: 68 x 35 in (172,7 x 88,9 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Iowa City, Iowa

Title of Artwork Displayed: Botanical

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Year Created: 2018

Format: Hand painted/printed fabrics, stitching, machine quilted

Dimensions: 41 x 68 in (104,1 x 172,7 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Iowa City, Iowa

Carol Cassidy

Carol Cassidy has been weaving since she was seventeen years old, working on almost every continent. As part of the United Nations Development Program, she moved to Laos, which she describes as a “weaver’s paradise: a country with a rich history of weaving and an elaborate vocabulary of design motifs.” Whether crafting intricate brocade, ikat, or tapestry textiles, she blends her artistry with traditional Lao methods. Her workshop and studio, Lao Textiles, is among the first commercial weaving workshops in the country. Her work has been exhibited at the Textile Museum, Washington, D.C.; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; and the Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York.

Title of Artwork Displayed: Totem I Naga (Ban Keune)



Year Created: 2010

Format: Woven silk

Dimensions: 84 ¼ x 28 ½ in. (214 x 72,4 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Vientiane, Laos

Title of Artwork Displayed: Totem II Naga (Ban Keune)



Year Created: 2010

Format: Woven silk

Dimensions: 73 ¼ x 21 in. (186,1 x 53,3 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Vientiane, Laos

Fred Easker

Fred Easker's landscape paintings, inspired by a mid-nineteenth-century American art movement called the Hudson River School, celebrate the wonders of the natural world and focus on rendering light in a meditative manner. His long, horizontal oil paintings transport viewers into scenes of Cedar Rapids and the Driftless Region along the Mississippi River in northeast Iowa, encouraging them to linger and appreciate even the smallest details in his calming landscapes.

Easker graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree and Master of Arts degree in education from the University of Iowa, Iowa City. Actively painting since 1994, he is involved in the arts, historic preservation, and humanities communities in Cedar Rapids. Easker completed the Arts

Midwest/NEA Regional Visual Arts Fellowship and was featured as an Iowa Master in a series produced by Iowa Public Television. His art is in permanent collections throughout the Midwest, namely the Anderson Museum of Art, Indiana, and the Charles H. MacNider Art Museum, Mason City, Iowa.

Title of Artwork Displayed: Winter River Morning



Year Created: 2022

Format: Oil on canvas

Dimensions: 16 x 46 in. (40,6 x 116,8 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Nancy Purington

Artist, curator, and consultant Nancy Purington observes water and its movement, seeking to capture nature's truth, dynamism, and beauty. From her series *Twelve Views of Water, Flame Stitch Ice & Snow* is a digital photograph taken along Iowa's Great River Road. It features sideways designs of snow and ice naturally arranged in what textile experts refer to as a flamestitch pattern. "At that time, I was intrigued by the concept of ice in flame. But in truth, it is the indigo color of the ice and the pulled-arrow, ikat-looking pattern of snow that is at the heart of my attraction...Growing up along a famous river, I am always aware of the powerful patterns of change that form in the ways of the river," she says.

Purington earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in art education at Park University, Parkville, Missouri; a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in painting from the Kansas City Art Institute, Missouri; and Master of Arts and Master of Fine Arts degrees in textile arts from the University of Iowa, Iowa City. Her work is part of the collections of the Figge Art Museum, Davenport, Iowa, and the Waterloo Center for the Arts, Waterloo, Iowa.

Title of Artwork Displayed: Flame Stitch Ice & Snow



Year Created: 2003

Format: Print on archival paper

Dimensions: 22 x 28 in. (55,9 x 71,1 cm)

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

Kristin Lansing-Stoeffler

Kristin Lansing-Stoeffler grew up visiting the farms of Northeast Iowa; their surroundings and people led her to paint colorful, expansive, and awe-inspiring landscapes. *The Spaces Between* contemplates the meaning of space in landscapes and nature. Lansing-Stoeffler explains: “Some

spaces, [such] as those between fence posts and crop rows, create a rhythmic cadence and predictable boundaries. Some spaces are mutable, as those between clouds and canopies, providing unpredictable gifts of light and warmth. Landscapes present an opportunity for us to reflect on these spaces and the spaces between and the meaning they hold for us. What spaces provide us with structure, and what spaces provide us with release?”

Lansing-Stoeffler received a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Iowa, Iowa City, specializing in art, psychology, journalism, and mass communication. She recently exhibited her work at the Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, home of the Grant Wood Studio, and is currently pursuing her doctorate degree at the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Title of Artwork Displayed: The Spaces Between



Year Created: 2017

Format: Oil on canvas

Dimensions: 48 x 60 in. (121,9 x 152,4 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Coralville, Iowa

Gregor Turk

Through his ceramic sculpture, mixed media constructions, photography, and public installations, artist and “topophilic” Gregor Turk investigates issues related to mapping, cultural signage, and marking place. “The appeal of mapping is not the actual geographic information but what that information tells us about ourselves as individuals and as a culture. I tend to focus on the fundamental qualities of mapping—the mysteriousness, inherent biases, cultural authoritativeness, and ability to simultaneously represent and distort reality,” Turk says. Part of his *Shift* series, *Shift #8* diverges from direct mapping imagery yet maintains certain cartographic references; the palette of blues and greens symbolizes the color of water and land on maps. *Topo Slabs* is constructed with several layers of ripped thin white clay strips applied sideways onto curved forms. The sinuous surface resembles topographic contour lines, water currents, and wood grain.

Turk earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Rhodes College, Memphis, Tennessee, and a Master of Fine Arts degree from Boston University. He served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Liberia and completed artist residencies at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, Alberta, Canada; the Ucross Foundation, Clearmont, Wyoming; and the Caversham Centre, South Africa. He was also an adjunct professor and instructor at the Savannah College of Art and Design and Georgia Southern University, both in Atlanta, as well as the University of Manitoba, Canada.

Title of Artwork Displayed: *Shift #8*



Year Created: 2011

Format: Ceramic

Dimensions: Each of 2, 20 x 16 $\frac{3}{5}$ x 3 $\frac{7}{8}$ in., 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ lbs. (50,8 x 42,2 x 9,8 cm, 7,9 kg)

Courtesy of the artist, Atlanta, Georgia

Title of Artwork Displayed: Topo Slabs



Year Created: 2019

Format: White ceramic

Dimensions: Each of 2, 20 x 16 x 4 in., 28 lbs. (50,8 x 40,6 x 10,2 cm, 12,7 kg)

Courtesy of the artist, Atlanta, Georgia

Yer Za Vue

Spontaneously painting wet on wet, Yer Za Vue works directly from real life. “Tapping into my emotion and utilizing simple forms, shape, lines, and dots, I decode and reorganize design in a way that creates harmonious interplay and the illusion of dimension. Abstracting and sacrificing form for the sake of design gives my paintings a distinctive look and style,” she says.

Vue earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in illustration from the Kansas City Art Institute, Missouri. After moving to Florida, she worked for over ten years for Disney on traditional animated films and shorts, such as *Pocahontas*, *Mulan*, and *Lilo & Stitch*. She has taught two-dimensional animation, illustration, and painting at the Art Institute of Portland, Oregon; the Winslow Art Center, Bainbridge Island, Washington; and the Pacific Northwest College of Art at Willamette University, Portland

Title of Artwork Displayed: The Pearl



Year Created: 2019

Format: Oil on canvas

Dimensions: 28 x 22 in. (71,1 x 55,9 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Portland, Oregon

Title of Artwork Displayed: Oregon Wildflowers



Year Created: 2020

Format: Oil on canvas

Dimensions: 24 x 20 in. (61 x 50,8 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Portland, Oregon

Acknowledgements

Washington, D.C.

- Camille Benton, Curator
 - Morgan Fox, Curatorial Assistant
 - Danielle Giampietro, Registrar
 - Tabitha Brackens, Editor
-

- Megan Pannone, Editor
- Tori See, Editor
- Amanda Brooks, Imaging Manager and Photographer

Vientiane, Laos

- Khamphanh Soukhavongsa
- Duangphachanh Takhounsouvanh
- Say Sayyalek
- Sephandone Thammavongsay
- Vixiene Monthongdy
- Somchit Bounheuang
- Souksavanh Mainolath
- Kanda Phommasone
- Phouthasone Keomoungkhone

Manila

- Aimee Claudette C. Chiu, Graphic Designer
 - Global Publishing Solutions, Printing
-