



Art in Embassies

U.S. DEPARTMENT *of* STATE

Art in Embassies Exhibition: United States Embassy Tbilisi

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 and scope 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

It is truly a privilege to display the work of five remarkable women artists in the Ambassador's Residence in Tbilisi, Georgia. My husband Harry and I are both from the beautiful state of California, renowned for its rich artistic heritage and culture. In that spirit, we selected pieces by artists who share a connection to the state and whose work reminds us of California's magnificent landscapes, dynamic communities, and spirit of innovation. The works of these uniquely talented artists have enriched our home away from home and have introduced a part of America to the many Georgian visitors we have welcomed to the Residence.

Sharon Barnes's stunning abstract *Music is What We Make in Music's Absence* is a beautiful reflection of what she refers to as "jazzification of the formal." Cathy Lu's ceramic-based sculpture *Customs Declaration* explores the immigrant experience in America and reminds me of my family's own customs declaration moments in our many travels back home from overseas. One can get lost in contemplating Erica Everage's *Bellies of the Beast*, a vibrant and richly textured work. Daisy Sheff's *Braid Ear-Covers* and *KB at Renaissance Fair* are quietly intuitive, evoking for me the shared history among the Americas. Finally, Alexandria Wallace's bold and geometric *Joist* invites reflection on technology and innovation, areas where California has often led the world as we address the challenges of our times.

I am incredibly grateful to each of these amazing artists for sharing their works. Through their generosity and talent, I have had the opportunity to introduce American art and artists to the wonderful and creative people of Georgia. Every guest in our home is drawn to, and into, their work. I also want to thank the U.S. Department of State, Art in Embassies Curator Claire D'Alba, and art consultant Jennifer Wechsler of California for their guidance and expertise. Cultural understanding fortifies the bonds between countries, and I hope this exhibition will continue to advance that legacy between the United States and Georgia.

Ambassador Robin L. Dunnigan
Tbilisi, Georgia

Artist Biographies

Sharon Louise Barnes (born 1949)

Sharon Louise Barnes describes her practice as “social abstraction,” creating paintings, sculptures, and installations that use visual language to convey political, social, and cultural ideas. “Through the medium of abstraction,” she says, “I tell stories and stimulate contemplation through color, tone, gesture, and texture. I often create a semblance of topography on my canvases using hundreds of cut fragments. It’s a process that challenges notions of a flat world, pointing instead to the deeply layered and overlapping nature of our humanity, which includes the interwoven experiences of African Americans that inspired jazz, blues, and the art that I create. I strive to make visual art that is sensory and emotive, able to cross cultural boundaries like music.”

Title of Artwork Displayed: **Music is What We Make in Music’s Absence**



Year Created: 2021

Format: Acrylic with cut and collaged materials on canvas

Dimensions: 66 x 96 in (167,6 x 243,8 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Los Angeles, California

Erica Everage (born 1987)

Erica Everage's process is driven by mark-making and an interest in how transformation is recorded through sequence and material. Everage works with color, texture, and structure while re-imagining ancient or abandoned imagery in contemporary forms. Many of the figures that inform her abstraction are ancient feminine Western deities or icons—such as the Sheela na gig—once placed above doors and entrances as guardians of liminal spaces. Her use of interstitial materials, such as burlap and artificial turf sub-base, suggests that this engagement with voids—and with voided, discarded, or in-between substances—begins at the level of the substrates itself.

Title of Artwork Displayed: Bellies of the Beast



Year Created: 2023

Format: Raw pigment, cold wax, watercolor, and oil stick on burlap

Dimensions: 36 x 76 in. (91,4 x 193 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Los Angeles, California

Cathy Lu (born 1984)

Cathy Lu draws inspiration from imagery found in Chinese ceramics and experiences of migration and cultural hybridity. As an artist of Taiwanese descent who grew up in Miami, Lu explores how immigrant experiences become interwoven with the broader American story. Glazed in dark greens, golds, and blacks, *Customs Declaration* is ripe with papayas, pineapples, plantains, jackfruit, durians, bitter melons, ginger, and other fruits. These are evocative reminders of distant homelands and traditions, cast from fruit purchased from local Asian-owned markets. The strands of fruits also suggest the transport of produce through migration and commerce, while the work's title alludes to the systems of regulation that attempt to control these flows.

Title of Artwork Displayed: *Customs Declaration* (detail)



Year Created: 2019

Format: Ceramic, glaze, gold luster, steel cable

Dimensions: Variable

Courtesy of the artist, Richmond, California

Daisy Sheff (born 1996)

Daisy Sheff's paintings and sculptures depict imagined narratives that interlace personal experience, theater, and folkloric imagery. Her process is intuitive and nonlinear, and her works often feature layered compositions made with paint, fabric, glitter, beads, and other materials that lend a textured, handcrafted quality. Drawing from dreams, memory, and story fragments, Sheff creates familiar scenes reassembled into something surreal—unexpectedly theatrical, symbolic, and intimate. “My paintings offer glimpses into detailed, private narratives,” she writes. “They share the arbitrary laws of fairytales—a world outside of everyday existence with a logic all its own. They are at once sincere and absurd. All these images recall pieces of stories, which I reconfigure in a search for something essential to emerge.”

Title of Artwork Displayed: KB at Renaissance Fair



Year Created: undated

Format: Oil and fabric collage on linen

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

Courtesy of C L E A R I N G, New York, New York

Title of Artwork Displayed: Braid Ear-Covers



Year Created: undated

Format: Oil and fabric collage on linen

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

Courtesy of C L E A R I N G, New York, New York

Alexandria Wallace (born 1990)

Alexandria Wallace's abstract paintings draw from photographs as well as sensory elements like sound, movement, and light to evoke a sense of place. *Joist* was inspired by a wall in Los

Angeles that Wallace frequently passed on walks through her neighborhood. "I was compelled to create a document of not only the wall but the experience of passing by it," Wallace said. Located on a congested road, the wall was layered with multiple coats of greenish paint to cover graffiti. The surface shifted with shadows from passing city buses. A window reflected the wall's surroundings, while a nearby light post cast a large, warm shadow across the building's facade at golden hour. "The completed painting became a portrait of this place and an index of my time coexisting alongside it."

Title of Artwork Displayed: Joist



Year Created: 1960

Format: Oil and wax on canvas

Dimensions: 30 x 42 in. (76,2 x 106,7 cm)

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

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