

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 chief-of-mission 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.

Introduction

It is an honor to have the opportunity to display a selection of American art by Gullah artists in our home in Luanda that showcases so evocatively the historical and cultural connections between our two countries. As we look at the works in this exhibition, we see not only beautiful paintings and crafts but also the links between the people and cultures of the United States and Angola.

The Gullah are African Americans who live in the Sea Islands and coastal regions of South Carolina, Georgia, and northern Florida, and who speak a creolized English containing many words, names, and grammatical features of African languages, preserved from their enslaved African ancestors. The rice-growing plantations in these areas particularly prized the irrigation, farming, and harvesting skills of slaves from Sierra Leone and the Windward and Rice Coasts of West Africa, who had expertise in growing rice, and, to a lesser degree, indigo and cotton. This preference may have made for a more homogeneous slave population who were able to preserve more of their culture and beliefs.

We were drawn to these works by their power to express the rich heritage of African Americans and the culture of the American South. The artists capture the beauty of daily activities that define an important aspect of American culture, which comes from a heritage shared with the Angolan people. The scenes of fishing, farming, and family life are at once uniquely American and yet recall like scenes from life in Angola. We see the similarities in the crafts, fishing techniques, and daily experiences that these works capture so well. This exhibition tells us the story of a shared history between the Angolan and American peoples and of the common themes that continue to influence both of our cultures today.

We hope that our guests will be as captivated as we were by this art. We also hope that this exhibition inspires you to think more about what connects our two peoples. We are grateful to the ART in Embassies program and the artists and lenders whose generosity has made the exhibition possible.

Ambassador and Mrs. Christopher J. McMullen

Luanda, September 2011



Gullah Fishnet
Acrylic on canvas, 24 x 36 in. (61 x 91,4 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Chuma,
Charleston, South Carolina



Basket Lady #16, 2008
Oil on canvas, 20 x 16 in. (50,8 x 40,6 cm)
Courtesy of the artist, Arlington, Texas

Casting a Net #4, 2006
Oil on canvas, 36 x 30 in. (91,4 x 76,2 cm)
Courtesy of the artist, Arlington, Texas



Carol A. Simmons

After a long career in computer programming, Carol Simmons returned to college and earned a Bachelor of Art degree in studio art from the College of Charleston, South Carolina. She has been painting professionally since 2001.

Creating has always been an important part of Simmons's life, and her personal interests and experiences serve as inspiration for her work. A love of color and texture began with her first creative outlet, which was sewing. She en-

joys experimenting with different media and techniques, and often incorporates fabric as a design element in her paintings. Simmons developed an interest in the Gullah culture while living in Charleston. An assignment in a painting class which focused on daily life in Charleston was the beginning of her *South Carolina Low-Country* series. These paintings celebrate the unique and enduring culture of the Gullah people.

www.carolasimmons.com

John Jones 1950

Self-taught artist John Jones explores life through art; his objective is to capture the African American experience – beginning with the slave trade in Africa and continuing through the Middle Passage and pre-Civil War era – and to contrast it with African American life today. He is known for his image series, such as *Confederate Currency; The Color of Money, Images of Slavery in Confederate and Southern States Currency* (featured in *The New York Times*, *TIME* magazine, and on National Public Radio) and *Buffalo Soldiers, the 54th Massachusetts Regiment and African Americans in the Military*. He is currently working on a project that focuses on the everyday lives of the Gullah people of South Carolina, and the struggles and issues they face in trying to maintain their unique culture in modern day America.

<http://gallerychuma.com>

James Denmark 1936

James Denmark was born into a family of artists and was exposed early to color and form. In college, he came under the tutelage of the artist and acclaimed African American art historian, Samella Lewis, who introduced him to the accomplishments of the African American art movement. In graduate school, he was nurtured by a talented community of artists, and was influenced by the abstract expressionists. The African American masters Norman Lewis, Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence, and Ernest Crichlow instilled in him an appreciation of his African American artistic heritage, and he began experimenting with collage, along with his primary media of watercolor and charcoal.

Denmark had a natural affinity for the improvisational medium of collage, and quickly developed his own unique style. With brightly hand colored papers, found papers, fabric, and objects, he creates compositions that go beyond the superficial and transitory and focus instead on what is eternal and universal.

<http://lowcountryartshop.com>



Backyard
Lithograph, 46 x 33 ½ in. (116,8 x 85,1 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Mojo Portfolio,
Union City, New Jersey

Jonathan Green 1955



While the appeal and perspective of Jonathan Green's works are truly modern and cosmopolitan, he looks to familiar images of his ancestral home of South Carolina for his subject matter and draws upon his personal experiences, steeped in the traditions of family, community, and life in the southern United States. Each of his paintings is a testament to the motivating power of place.

Green's work has been exhibited worldwide, and is held in museums internationally. In its depiction of the simple, essential tasks of life, his art has served as a catalyst for the arts, as well as providing inspiration for civic and educational programs. Twenty-two of his paintings were the inspiration for *Off the Wall & Onto the Stage: Dancing the Art of Jonathan Green*, produced by the Columbia City Ballet of South Carolina. Bringing together music, dance, and the visual arts, these powerful ballet vignettes have received broad critical acclaim.

www.jonathangreenstudios.com



Sharing the Chores
Lithograph, 40 x 44 in. (101,6 x 111,8 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Mojo Portfolio, Union City, New Jersey

Farm Woman
Lithograph, 40 x 46 in. (101,6 x 116,8 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Mojo Portfolio, Union City, New Jersey

Irene Tison

Irene Tison was born in Jasper County, South Carolina, in the late 1950s to parents who were sharecroppers. She remembers the cotton fields that her family planted, especially at harvest time. Some of her twelve older sisters and brothers helped her parents with both the planting and the harvesting of crops.



Tison started drawing before she entered the first grade and was guided in her artistic efforts by her mother. A self-taught, "outsider" artist, Tison began painting the Gullah life she saw around her when she was six years old. She remembers that her mother would come home from the fields and relax by sketching the world she knew as a child. Tison would sit at her mother's feet and watch her make a plain piece of paper come alive. She believes that every canvas is a dream waiting to be awakened to a painting, and that everything experienced in a world of joyful colors goes unseen until it becomes a painting.

www.redpianotoo.com

Fripp Island: A Day to Fish
Acrylic on canvas, 18 x 24 in. (45,7 x 61 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Chuma,
Charleston, South Carolina

Leroy Campbell 1956

"I am a self-taught artist reared by two cities rich in African American culture. I was born in Charleston, South Carolina, and raised in New York City. My work is an extension of my roots & takes a critical view of social, political and cultural issues of the African American life. Though many of my subjects are depicted living out their daily routine, my focus is on the celebration of the human spirit, and the pursuit of the American dream. I am inspired, first and foremost, by my experiences and what I see. But I am also moved by the images of the South depicted by Romare Bearden, and Jacob Lawrence's capture of the history and struggle of African Americans. It was after viewing Bearden's work in 1987 that I began incorporating a three dimensional element, which gave me the ability to create rawness and tension on a two dimensional medium."

www.leroycampbelloriginals.com

A Piece of Mind. Giclée on canvas, 40 x 30 in. (101,6 x 76,2 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Chuma, Charleston, South Carolina

Endurance. Giclée on canvas, 40 x 30 in (101,6 x 76,2 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Chuma, Charleston, South Carolina



Vernelle Bunny Smith Rodrigues

Gullah artist Vernelle "Bunny" Smith Rodrigues is a native of Georgetown, South Carolina. She specializes in creating and fabricating story quilts and in recreating the folk art of the Carolina Low Country. Her *Gullah Ooman Story Quilt* tells the story of the Gullah people, from their West African village to their emancipation from slavery in the Low Country. In developing the story of the quilt, the artist and her husband, Andrew, did extensive research on the history of African and Gullah (South Carolina) Low Country people, as well as African history and the history of the American African Diaspora.

Gullah Ooman Quilt also explains the important role that the Gullah people's technological knowledge and physical labor played in the successful development of open land cattle farming and the rice and indigo cultures that were the foundation of South Carolina's rich colonial agricultural economy. The centerpiece depicts the strong "Gullah Ooman" who carried and still carries our dreams, hopes, and aspirations; who taught us then and teaches us now how to survive in a hostile environment, and through it all, gives us strength to endure.

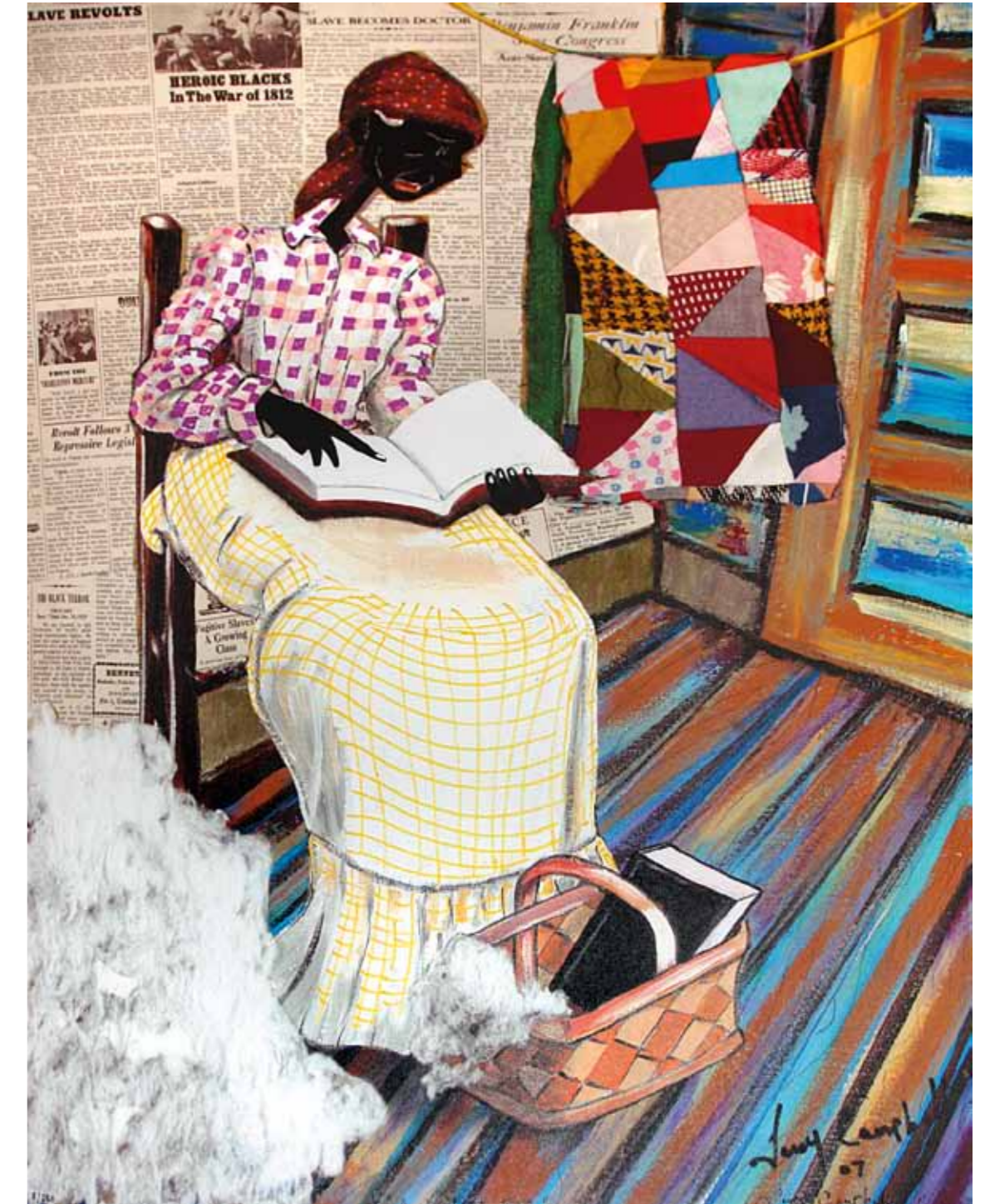
<http://gallerychuma.com>



Gullah Ooman Story Quilt
Quilt, 90 x 72 in. (228,6 x 182,9 cm)
Courtesy of the artist, Pawleys Island, South Carolina

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