



**Art in Embassies Exhibition**  
**U.S. MISSION TO**  
**THE OECD, PARIS**

**Derrick Velasquez** *Untitled 61*, 2013

*Marine vinyl, walnut, 48 x 36 x 1 1/2 in. (121.9 x 91.4 x 3.8 cm)*

*Courtesy of the artist and Pentimenti Gallery, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

# Introduction

Born of the Marshall Plan, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is a vital forum where countries come together to share best practices for promoting growth and prosperity around the world. Art can be an impetus for learning, creativity, and innovation – building blocks of prosperity. The Art in Embassies exhibition in the United States Mission residence celebrates this vitality through the expressions of ten contemporary artists. Although the works represent a spectrum of styles and media, language and storytelling are recurring themes. Baba Wagué Diakit's ceramic platter, *Hold Onto My Back*, evokes the bold textile designs of the artist's native Mali while being animated by the stories passed to him through generations of his family. Aïda Touré's colorful abstractions are deeply rooted in Islamic tradition and her Malian-Gabonese background; calligraphic lines of her Sufi poetry gracefully dance across their surfaces. Israeli-American Yael Kanarek's mixed media construction, *Rainbow, Toward a New Balance (Made in the USA)*, is made of hundreds of hand-cast silicone cutouts of the word "white" presented in an array of colors and nine languages, cleverly playing with the visual properties of language while raising questions about identity, branding, and global manufacturing. Shinique Smith's exuberant diptych clusters second-hand finds: a collage of patterned fabrics, feathers, and ephemera – material objects so commonly collected and discarded – in the center of swirling gestural strokes of acrylic and ink. Within the dual nature of the piece, the truth seems literally to lie in the middle, in the search for wholeness, or as the title suggests, a *Mutual Core*. Paulette Tavormina's exquisite object-filled photograph, *Botanicals V (Peonies and Wisteria)*, updates seventeenth century still life painting and reminds us of its enduring lessons about the passage of time. These works and others in the exhibition join together in a colorful, layered, and lively conversation. We hope that each viewer will enjoy the exhibition and come away inspired by the universal language of art.

**Camille Benton, Curator**

*Washington, D.C.*

*October 2014*

# Deborah Dancy

[ born 1949, Alabama ]

“My work is about surprise, color, process, and encounters with the self. From a host of references, ideas emerge; fairy tales, children’s drawings, jazz standards, and film provide the springboard. In the work there is a shifting terrain that exists between abstraction and figuration that is constantly in flux. Space is slippery, simultaneously deep and shallow. Lines are anxious, hesitant or defiant, and either color is saturated or oddly muted and sometimes existing in the same space. These elements play off one another. Body fragments, architectural elements, tangible and furtive seem to insert themselves within an unfolding drama. I find anxiety and delight in the process of making work, moving back and forth between drawing into painting and painting into drawing, coaxing process and ambiguity to enter into the image. It is within this space of abstraction and representation and the ambiguity of meaning I find the territory of discovery.”

<http://deborahdancy.com>

*A Bridge Too Far*, 2013. Oil on canvas, 60 x 72 in. (152.4 x 182.9 cm). Courtesy of the artist, Storrs, Connecticut >



# Baba Wagué Diakité

[ born 1961, Bamako, Mali ]

Baba Wagué Diakité was born in 1961 in Bamako, Mali. His mother gave him her father's name, Wagué, which means "A Man of Trust." Wagué spent his early childhood with his grandmother in the village of Kassaro. He tended his uncles' sheep and helped in his grandmother's rice and peanut fields. His free time was spent with friends in the bush, catching lizards and protecting rice and peanut fields from birds and monkeys. Later Wagué moved to Bamako to be with his mother and to pursue formal schooling. He maintains that his best education came from stories told to him by his grandmother and mother about animals and the First People. Wagué grew up drawing, first for his own pleasure, then for schoolwork, and finally for part-time jobs. He first learned claywork, however, after meeting American artist Ronna Neuenschwander, and moving to Portland, Oregon, in 1985. There, he began using clay as his canvas.

Wagué is founder and director of the Ko-Falen Cultural Center in Bamako, which enables artists and travelers from other countries to live, meet, study, and collaborate with the artists of Mali. The Ko-Falen Cultural Center encourages cross-cultural exchanges through art, dance, music, and ceremony to promote a greater understanding and respect between people.

<http://babawague.wordpress.com>  
[www.ko-falen.org](http://www.ko-falen.org)

*Hold Onto My Back*, 2013. Ceramic, diameter: 22 in. (55.9 cm); depth: 2 ½ in. (6.4 cm). Courtesy of the artist, Portland, Oregon >





# Homare Ikeda

[ born Yoron Island, Japan ]

“Painting has become a vehicle to travel in and out of the world of the unknown. A blob of paint is daubed, scratched, scraped and painted one layer upon another. The thickly painted surface is reminiscent of my journey into the heart of the sea where all my reflections of life are imbued. The sea is the genesis of the original form of life. I begin my painting with a simple vision. The first stages are usually kept fluid and open. As the painting progresses, I keep adding or scraping the layers of paint. I see them as the metaphor of life. At a certain point in this process, the painting starts to take over my control. The painting is transformed to the state of unknown. There, I put down my paintbrush. My journey into the dream of sea begins again.

Working with painting is mystical. I often don’t know what I am doing, yet painting seems to know how and what to do. I spend many hours looking at painting as if painting is able to say something. When things are right it does speak. I add one more stroke and wait for her voice to come out. It is a fascinating space.”

Born on the small subtropical island of Yoron, near Okinawa, Japan, Homare now lives and works in Denver, Colorado.

[www.homareikeda.com](http://www.homareikeda.com)

*Blue River*, 2014. Acrylic and oil on canvas, 52 x 46 in. (132.1 x 116.8 cm). Courtesy of the artist, Denver, Colorado >





# Yael Kanarek

[ born 1967, Israeli-American ]

The explosively saturated and fluorescent color palette of *Rainbow, Towards a New Balance (Made in the USA)* is drawn from a pair of athletic shoes belonging to the artist. Its three-dimensional surface uses the word “white” as a compositional unit that is repeated hundreds of times, in nine languages, as hand cast silicone text. Part of Kanarek’s *Textwork* series, which began in 2007, *Rainbow* navigates the territorial spaces created by language – in this case, connecting hue to branding and to the globalized use of polymers to manufacture durable equipment. Shuffling the physical properties of language, Kanarek also creates a cognitive interference known as the Stroop affect. “The gap between text and color creates a pause and allows a white boundless space to emerge in the viewer’s mind, recalling Wassily Kandinsky’s observations in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*,” says Kanarek.

Transliterations: Amharic – *Holi*, Arabic – *Abiad*, English – *White*, German – *Weiss*, Hebrew – *Lavan*, Chinese – *Bái*, Japanese – *Shiro*, Latin – *Niveus*, Russian – *Bhehley*.



***Rainbow, Toward a New Balance (Made in the USA), 2013***

*Shoes worn by the artist, wood, silicone words in nine languages:*

*Amharic, Arabic, English, German, Hebrew, Japanese, Chinese, Latin, Russian*

*Diameter: 42 inches (106.7 cm); depth: 2 in. (5.1 cm). Courtesy of the artist and bitforms gallery, New York, New York*



# Seton Smith

[ born 1955, New Jersey ]

Photographs by New York-based artist Seton Smith are at once abstract and vividly familiar. Smith is interested in concepts of how architecture and environment affect people psychologically. She invites people to be more conscious of their architectural environments by presenting images that focus on the formal aspects of a given space, such as color, line, form, and perspective. This photographic strategy begins to decode the symbols embedded within each space. All of Smith's photographs are heat mounted between sheets of nonreflecting Plexiglas, which results in a unique, sculptural effect.

<http://seattle.winstonwachter.com>

*Indivisible*, 2013. Chromogenic print face mounted to non-reflective Plexiglas with aluminum brace, 36 x 26 in. (91.4 x 66 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Winston Wächter Fine Art, Seattle, Washington >





# Shinique Smith

[ born 1971, Baltimore, Maryland ]

Shinique Smith is inspired by the vast vocabulary of things that we consume and discard. Examining the ways in which such objects can resonate on a personal and social scale, Smith pursues the graceful and spiritual qualities in the written word and the everyday.

In works made from the class of objects we call “belongings,” Smith collides the intractable hard geometry and hard thinking that defines urban existence – what Paul D. Miller called “cubes of consciousness” in a 2010 catalogue essay – with the softening, emotionally steeped influence of the worn-down, nostalgic, or forgotten. She describes a way of living and looking that is fueled by a flow of relationships between opposites: discrete displaced parts are transformed, becoming one, when grouped or bound together by her hand through a ritual of process. The resulting configurations often straddle the line between chaos and restraint.

Ascribing equal value to both cherished and discarded objects, Smith reinterprets the connections on which we build our personal myths and examines the relationships that contemporary societies establish with the inanimate and the intimate. What is valuable to an individual, culture or society, and why is it valuable? Through her efforts, a new spirit emerges.

[www.jamescohan.com](http://www.jamescohan.com)



**Mutual Core, 2013**

*Acrylic, ink, fabric, and paper collage on canvas*

*Diptych; overall: 28 x 44 x 2 in. (71.1 x 111.8 x 5.1 cm); each panel: 28 x 22 x 2 in. (71.1 x 55.9 x 5.1 cm)*

*Courtesy of the artist and James Cohan Gallery, New York / Shanghai*

# Paulette Tavormina

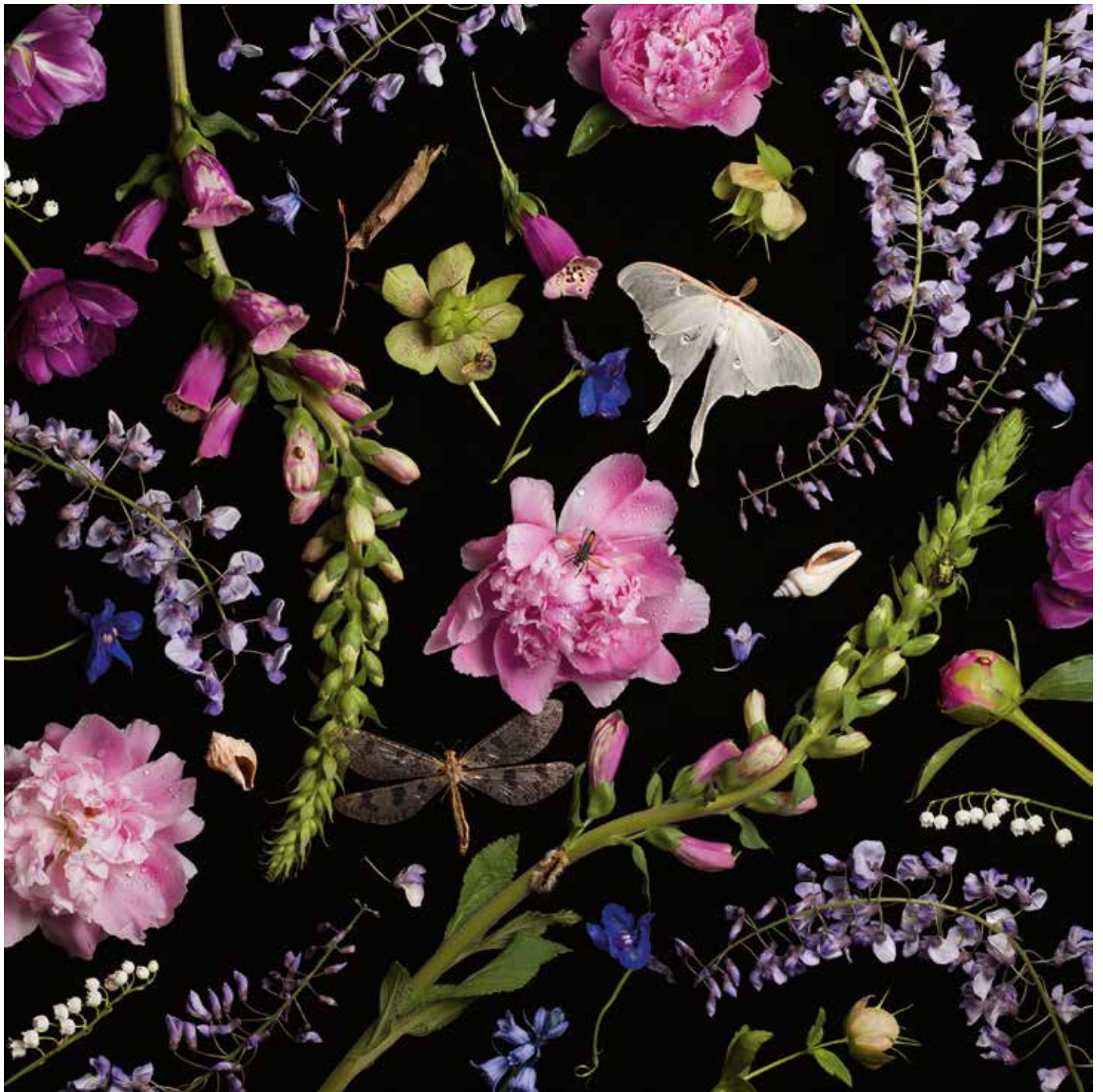
[ born 1949, Rockville Centre, New York ]

"I have long been drawn to the seventeenth century old master still life painters Giovanna Garzoni, Francisco de Zurbarán, and Adriaen Coorte. I am particularly fascinated by Zurbarán's mysterious use of dramatic light, Garzoni's masterful compositions and color palette, and Coorte's unique placements of objects.

Seventeenth century Europe witnessed an explosion of interest in the natural world. Botanical encyclopedias from the period are records of the discoveries made on extensive explorations during this 'Golden Age' of global trading. Still life painters incorporated shells, insects, exotic fruits, and flowers found abroad alongside Venetian glass and Chinese porcelain. Their vignettes served as a tribute to newly discovered corners of the world. Worldly in their composition, these paintings also speak to universal themes as relevant then as now: the fragility of life and love, fleeting beauty and *tempus fugit*, the swift passage of time."

[www.paulettetavormina.com](http://www.paulettetavormina.com)

***Botanicals V (Peonies and Wisteria)***, 2013. Photograph, 36 x 36 in. (91.4 x 91.4 cm)  
Courtesy of the artist, New York, New York, and Robert Klein Gallery, Boston, Massachusetts >



# Aïda Touré

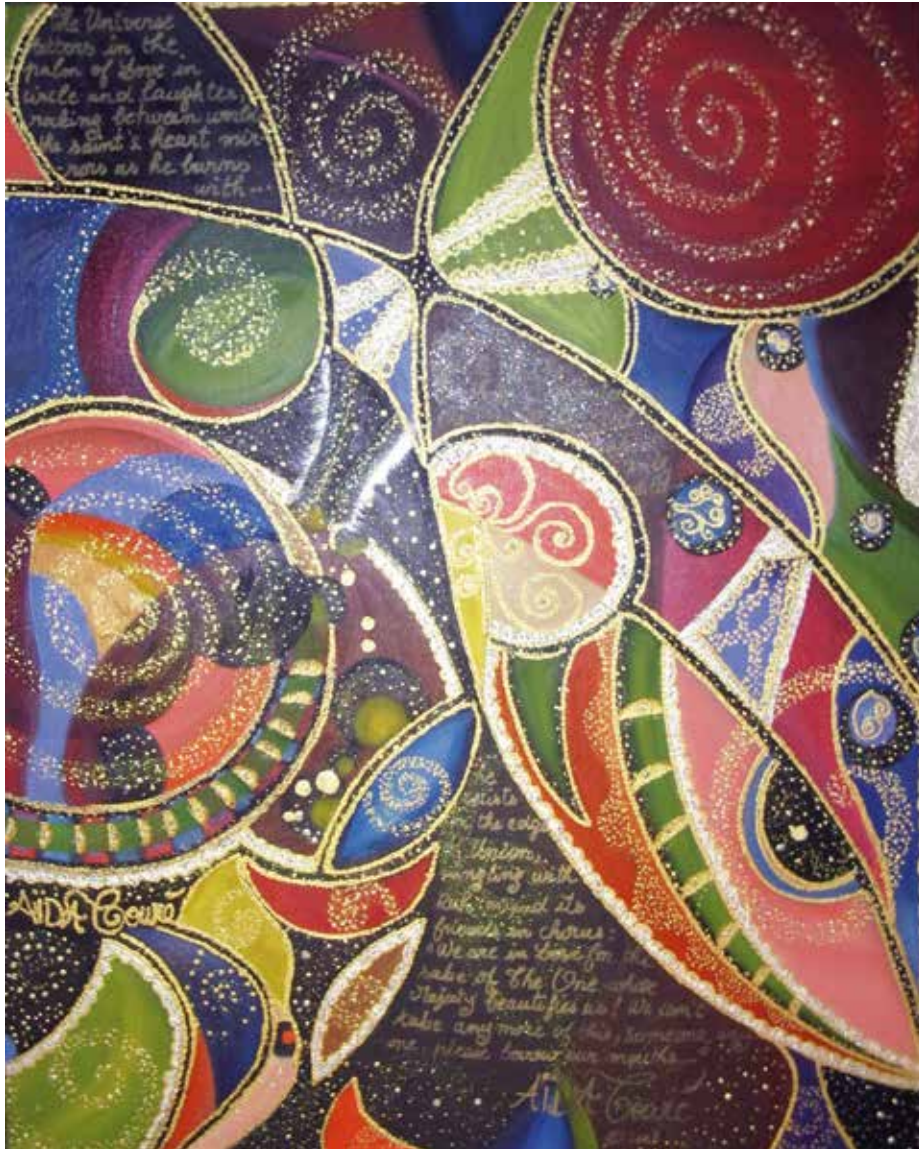
[ born Gabon ]

“After having published three books of poetry, I now present an exclusive collection of paintings that manifest a visual dimension of my Sufi poems. The act of painting has been unexpected for me. Just like the composition of my poetry, it suddenly happened after a period of retreat. Having had no conventional training, it is through the luminous corridor of Islamic tradition and my Malian and Gabonese cultures that my pens and paint brushes wander in praise of The Beloved.

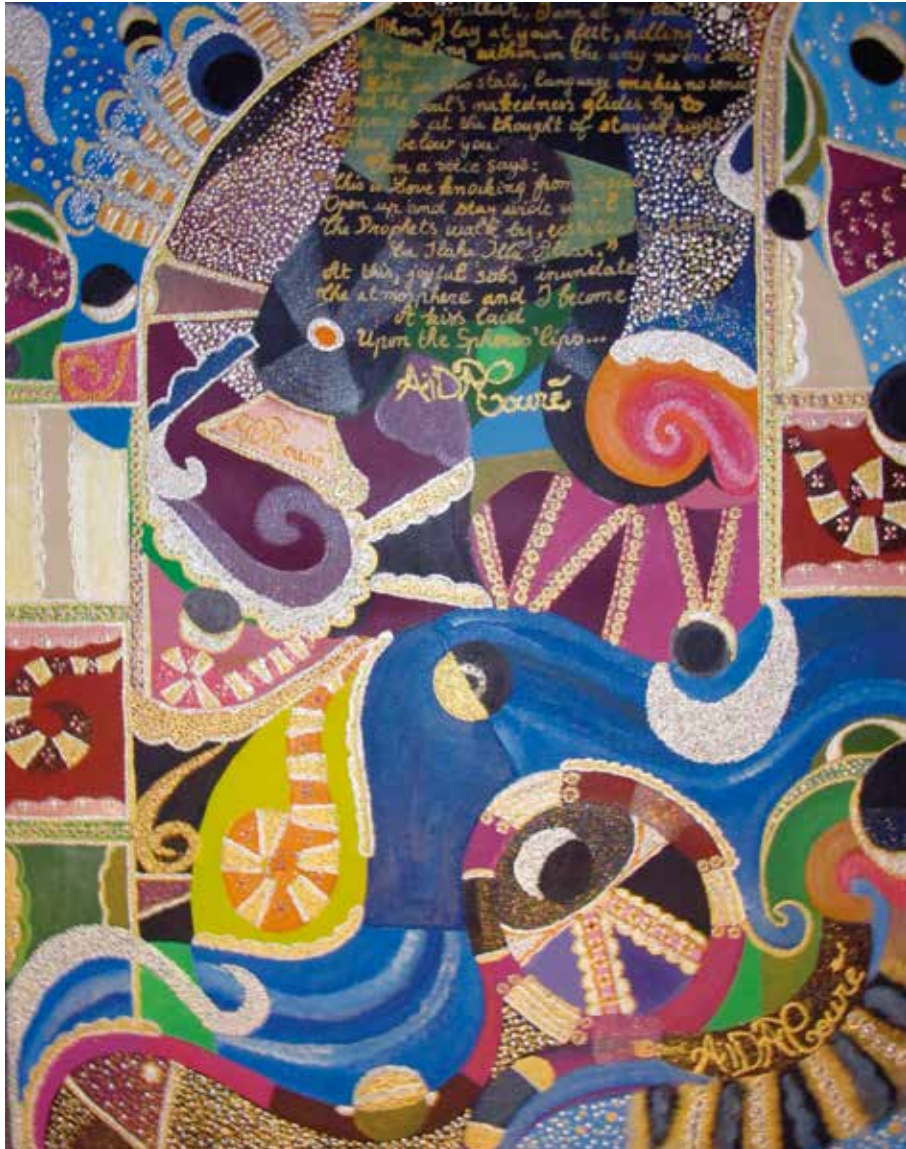
Years ago, while reading a poem from *Nocturnal Light*, I got submerged with inner images of immense beauty so suddenly I picked up brushes, paint tubes, and I transcribed these impressions upon canvas. Thus, my paintings start with the composition of a poem whose imagery profoundly lingers with me; that eventually compels me to paint it. Since this artwork took form from Sufi poetry, my literary and visual expressions unfold in oneness; they capture states the prostrated soul encounters as it walks out of self in quest and honor of The Divine.”

<http://aidatoure.com>





**On the Edge of Union**, 2010. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 30 x 24 in. (76.2 x 61 cm). Courtesy of the artist, Union City, New Jersey



*Upon the Sphere's Lips*, 2006. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 28 x 22 in. (71.1 x 55.9 cm). Courtesy of the artist, Union City, New Jersey

# Derrick Velasquez

[ born 1982, Lodi, California ]

“My work is an attempt to construct a language of structure that questions our physical and psychological interactions with industrially manufactured materials that exist in the spaces, both large and small, we inhabit. Through an investigative process, I project varying forces, like gravity or tension, on plywood, two by fours, Masonite, marine vinyl, acrylic, hardwoods, and the human body in hopes of teasing out their obvious and sometimes less apparent qualities.

In my untitled series of vinyl wall pieces I meticulously hand cut individual strips of marine vinyl and stack and accumulate them onto precut wooden forms. As a bookbinder, the vinyl is a material I use as covers for hand bound soft cover journals. The form and process of the formalized wall pieces came from an everyday practice of precutting enclosure straps for the journals and placing them on a screw on the wall. As these began to accumulate, I realized I was denying the intended surface of the vinyl and exposing the innards of the synthetic fabric. This creates a new flat surface that lacks the continuity of a sheet of fabric and becomes a construction of sophisticated and subtle color harmonies by way of hundreds of hand cut and layered strips. As the number of the vinyl strips grows, the relationship of the visual structure slowly shifts; the vinyl no longer conforms to the shape of the wood form but instead rounds out to a gentle curve.”

<http://pentimenti.com>  
[www.derrickvelasquez.com](http://www.derrickvelasquez.com)





**Untitled 61, 2013**

*Marine vinyl, walnut*

*48 x 36 x 1 1/2 in. (121.9 x 91.4 x 3.8 cm)*

*Courtesy of the artist and Pentimenti Gallery,  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

# David Warner

[ born 1954, Port Chester, New York ]

“It is a paradox of nature that while considering the world around us, we are constantly reminded of questions that transcend what we actually see. I can only wonder about the forces that create a particular place at a particular moment, and the serendipity of being there. I paint landscapes as impressions of places and the feelings we associate with that moment. They are expressions, though, of what ultimately cannot be understood in a purely narrative sense. The characteristics of my paintings are an emphasis on color and abstract patterns. The two weave around objects from the natural landscape and coalesce as shape and movement influenced by mood, light, and space.”

<http://quintenzgallery.com>





***Edge of Mt. Sopris,***  
2014

*Acrylic on canvas*  
60 x 48 in.

(152.4 x 121.9 cm)

*Courtesy of the artist,  
Carbondale, Colorado*

# 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 foreign 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."

*"For fifty years, Art in Embassies has played an active diplomatic role by creating meaningful cultural exchange through the visual arts. The exhibitions, permanent collections and artist exchanges connect people from the farthest corners of an international community. Extending our reach, amplifying our voice, and demonstrating our inclusiveness are strategic imperatives for America. Art in Embassies cultivates relationships that transcend boundaries, building trust, mutual respect and understanding among peoples. It is a fulcrum of America's global leadership as we continue to work for freedom, human rights and peace around the world."*

— John Forbes Kerry  
U.S. Secretary of State

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