

Lara Taubman
Art in Embassies
Catalogue Essay
United States Embassy Residence
Art in Embassies Program
Bucharest, Romania
October 8, 2006

ARTIST LIST

Clifford Still
Constantin Brancusi
David Smith
Hans Hoffman
Herbert Ferber
Jackson Pollock
Judith Rothschild
Lee Krasner
Milton Avery
Richard Pousette-Dart
Robert Motherwell
Sidney Geist
Willem de Kooning

Please note the addition of important works generously loaned that are included in the exhibit but were created prior to the New York School period of American art. They are as follows:

Asher B. Durand
Charles Wilson Peale

Examining possibly the most axial period in American history socially, politically and culturally, pre- and post World War II marks the first time that the United States government used its culture, specifically visual art to make an international statement using the Abstract Expressionist art movement. Though extremely insular and individualistic, these artists believed in liberty both personal and political. They developed a visual language through which ideals of freedom and liberty were subsequently co-opted by the United States government into an international cultural protocol. Today, Abstract Expressionism represents the first time that the United States was recognized by the international community as a

place of cultural import as it proved itself to have an aesthetic sophistication that was matched by the country's recent military and political successes of that time.

A historical collection of Abstract Expressionist art in Romania's United States Embassy residence brings a body of this work once again onto an international stage, not as a tool of power, but as one of mutual acknowledgement and diplomacy. Images speak all languages without words, thus, they have the ability to be as poignant as the most profound diplomacy. It is an opportunity to present this work not just as a historical marker, but to also show the perspective of the artists and how they contextualized their work during that time period.

The nature of this collection reflects that. There are some quintessential representations of the period hanging in the collection; nevertheless, it is largely comprised of works that might have been seen in a round of studio visits in New York City in 1945. Works shown here are formative to the grander, more conclusive signature works by these artists through paintings and sculpture but there is a focus within this collection on the more flexible mediums of drawings, sketches and prints.

There are some seemingly aberrational works that we are fortunate to have as part of this collection. A painting of George Washington at Yorktown by Charles Willson Peale and a Hudson River School painting by Asher Brown Durand. Undoubtedly, these are historical leaps of time but their content and contexts are framed in similarity to the fundamental ideas of Abstract Expressionism. Ideas of republicanism, patriotism, independence, regional and international awareness exist within every work here. Granted, each is expressed in a different way but all of these works were made by artists who sought ideals that were partially shaped by their experiences as Americans.

The most appropriate facet of this collection has been to bring Abstract Expressionist art to the home country of Constantin Brancusi: an artist who had a significant influence on this group. Brancusi was an artist who embodied the meaning of cosmopolitan, raised in Romania he migrated to Paris to study art in the early part of the 20th century. There he joined seminal visual artists of Modernism such as Marcel Duchamp and Frances Picabia. Their collaborations brought Brancusi's influence from Paris to New York City in the nineteen twenties and thirties, just at the time that Abstract Expressionism was taking shape. It is an historical event to bring these works back to the regional setting that influenced them as a tribute to one

of the most influential international artists of the 20th century.

The ability to cross cultures through the use of art has been the expression of my joy in the curating of this exhibit. In a time of extreme international scrutiny and conflict, it is a gift for me to have been invited to curate an exhibit that presents some of the best culture that the United States has to offer. Romania is a country rich in its culture and I feel lucky to have had the privilege to be a part of it.

I would like to thank the following people for their indispensable contributions to the formation of this exhibit:

Art in Embassies

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Posthumously, I would like to dedicate this exhibit to my friend and teacher Sidney Tillim whose teaching and influence on me helped to make this exhibit possible.