

VANITY FAIR

The Diplomacy of Art

By Hillary Clinton
Photograph by Todd Eberle



Artists whose work has been displayed in U.S. Embassies and Consulates around the world, from left: Cai Guo-Qiang, Kiki Smith, Shahzia Sikander, Marina Abramović, Carrie Mae Weems, Nick Cave, Pedro Reyes, Fred Tomaselli, Jeff Koons, Jenny Holzer, Julie Mehretu, Jim Drain, and Seton Smith; photographed on the balcony of the U.S. State Department, in Washington, D.C.

In my line of work, we often talk about the art of diplomacy as we try to make people's lives a little better around the world. But, in fact, art is also a tool of diplomacy. It reaches beyond governments, past the conference rooms and presidential palaces, to help us connect with more people in more places. It is a universal language in our search for common ground, an expression of our shared humanity.

That's why Art in Embassies is so important. The Museum of Modern Art first envisioned this global visual-arts program in 1953, and President John F. Kennedy formalized it at the U.S. Department of State in 1963. Working with over 20,000 participants globally, including artists, museums, collectors, and galleries, this landmark public-private partnership shares the work of more than 4,000 American and international artists annually in more than 200 U.S. Embassies and Consulates around the world. These can be exhibitions, permanent collections, site-specific commissions, or two-way artist exchanges. Many remarkable artists have been involved with Art in Embassies, and this year we were proud to award the first biennial U.S. Department of State Medal of Arts to Cai Guo-Qiang, Jeff Koons, Shahzia Sikander, Kiki Smith, and Carrie Mae Weems.

Just think about what an exhibition of American and local artists means to someone across the world yearning to express herself or himself. Artists push boundaries and show what the human spirit is capable of, forming bonds of understanding with people they may never know. For over 50 years, Art in Embassies has showcased the best of this talent. I am grateful, as it promotes creativity, ignites collaboration, and builds on American diplomacy.