

## Wilson Center Conversation

VOICEOVER: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. The US Department of State Office of Art in Embassies, the Aspen Institute, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center are pleased to present a conversation with the honorees featuring moderator Glenn Lowry, Director at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Our opening act this evening is poet and performer Marc Bamuthi Joseph.

JOSEPH: Hi! You can applaud, it's all good!

(audience applause)

JOSEPH: I know we're in a hallowed environment and everything but we're also I think celebrating a vessel for reciprocity that demands that you do as much work as I do, okay? Yes?

AUDIENCE: Yes.

JOSEPH: Cool, great! So it'll work if you do stuff like applaud and giggle. Cool. Love it! Cool.

(audience applause, laughter)

JOSEPH: Our ancestors hacked bitterly at sugarcane. We are the sweet never tasted by their sweat-soaked tongues. They begged for us to be here never knowing who or what we'd become. We are their echoing elegy perpetually sung we are their echoing elegy ... I was in Haiti once, at this vodou ceremony and I passed out. Personally I think I seen a little bit of blood and I just (noise) you know, like a little Beyoncé. But the people I was with, folks who all honor and respect Haitian culture believed that I had been possessed. They said I fell, like this (demonstrates).

A pawn or a priest, either is possible. Who knows where your body goes when the spirit flies away. When you lose your mind, what jumps in to take its place? The Haitians called me "ne-gi-ne" (?). My granmè, my oldest living relative, once told me that "gi-ne" is the tunnel that connects Haiti to Africa, so when a Haitian calls you "ne-gi-ne", that's the real shit.

(audience laughter)

JOSEPH: That's like super black. It's true. It's like a stripe. I wonder what they'd say if they knew my kid was half Chinese and my girlfriend was white. This story begins in the middle, halfway across the planet. I think that I'm awake. Last night at dusk I took a red-eye across the Atlantic, I landed on the first morning of summer in Europe. For the last forty-something hours it's been day. I think I might be dreaming but I'm not sure.

I'm in Paris for a festival for contemporary choreographers from Africa. By the grace of god I get to watch. It's one of the perks I've managed to convince the performing arts machine that I am both high arts and hip-hop. Shh. (laughs) Don't tell em. I'm stuck. I'm in between. Last row of the audience falling up, waking dream. In Paris I represent my country in the flesh. I am the surrogate for Allen Iverson and

50 Cent. What good is a black man in America if stripped of his right to threats? How hip-hop can I be if they let me on today's set?

Anyway! As a guest of the institution I'm at this festival and on the first night is this soloist from South Africa. She does this joint where she puts on this Easter Bunny costume head thing and a pink tutu and like Pippy Longstocking tights and a pointe shoe and a Converse okay? And she performs this piece where she climbs in and out of a plastic bag yeah—

(audience applause)

JOSEPH: Yeah for like 20 minutes, okay? And then she walks into the audience with saran wrap and she puts it over people's mouths (kissing noise) and she kisses them over their dental dam-ed lips (kissing noise) for like another 20 minutes. And then it ends. That's it.

In my head, the vision of South Africa is Robben Island. Stephen Biko. In my head it is always the late 80s and Nelson Mandela is the first person that I ever truly wanted to be free. The first major metaphor for liberating me. The triangle of perspective is crazy. I'm looking at this African woman for some sense of root. She's looking at European performance art trading in a mandala for a frayed pink tutu and Europeans have always been looking at me ever since my name was Langston Satchmo Josephine. Since the days when they bred me. I am the descendants of an experiment in psyche and body, a fetish taking my place in line, fractured, wondering when this woman's history stopped being mine. I've been flying for the last forty-something hours, I am no sense of time, I'm just wondering which one of us is asleep and which one is just tired.

And then. Exactly right then. I fall. This story begins in the middle, halfway across the planet. I think that I'm awake. Last night at dusk I took a red-eye across the Pacific and landed on the first morning of summer in Japan. For the last forty-something hours it's been day. I think I might be dreaming but I'm not sure. I'm a living word lost in translation. I guess this is a near death experience.

I'm at the club in Japan. Everybody in hip-hop knows that the culture is huge over here, mostly cause we seen it on a Yo MTV Raps interview with the Wu-Tang Clan. Tokyo is like Times Square times ten. Midnight feels like 11 a.m. plugged into a socket. My hosts are all hip-hop kids, they insist, tired as I am, I roll with them to the spot. I lead with my ego. I think, why not. I imagine that when I enter the club, the music will stop. The rivers will part. The reverence will begin. Behold! Japanese motherloves that sweat my culture, authenticity is in the building! It's me, thank you!

(audience laughter, light applause)

JOSEPH: Born in 1975 in Queens, Tribe Called Quest, Niles, Run DMC, the real hip-hop is obviously oozing from all of my pores for all to see and all... ignore me. I am the only black dude in the room except for the ones we're all listening to. I'm either so racist or so self-absorbed or oblivious that I imagine some kind of props are due. Fist up. Head nods. Eye contact. None of that. I'm invisible. Race doesn't matter. I am just another guy that might be a little too old to be at the club.

(audience laughter)

JOSEPH: And in the great tradition of the wrong guy at the right party, I retired to a corner, the music still bumping, but I ain't been asleep since yester-something and I fall ...

This story begins in the middle. With the first African American woman I ever met. Was a white chick from Lubbock, Texas. Molly Melching, bigaman? She moved to Senegal 20 years ago to work for UNESCO and she never left. She married a Senegalese man, had a daughter, was happy. Until he left. Molly speaks Wolof, Tree, she's a beast negotiator at the marketplace, geared down, highly respected in her community. The Senegalese that I met refer to Molly as an African American. They refer to me as a black American. When I get off the plane in Senegal, I don't know if we have plans, I don't have much money, I have Molly's number in my back pocket given to me by friends of friends, I have ideas in my head also given to me by friends of friends. They said, boy, in Africa, they will love you! Just find a dance, just find a hip-hop, somebody will adopt you, take you in, don't worry, don't trip!

Three days into my trip, I been hustled out of my drawers. And I'm spending money at a rate that's going to leave me homeless in eight days. And I got one of them non-transferrable, non-fuck-with-able tickets, says I got to be here for four months. In tears, I call Molly. She invites me to her home in Thies, she says I can stay. Not quite the African I thought was gonna take me in. Molly works for an NGO called Toastan. She's a champion of women's health, she wants to fight against female circumcision in rural villages, she calls it mutilation.

I become her roadie. I sit in the back seat gazing at endless stretches of endless flatland and wide open sky as we ride from one end of the country to the other. We ride to the middle of nowhere. Nowhere. Come to a stop in front of a single-stone building with a thatched roof, three girls come out all smiles and grace, I think cool, Molly's gonna meet with them and then we're going to be out. And then this boy comes out and he starts playing a drum, which I think is kind of annoying to have going on during a meeting but you know who the hell am I, the American. You know, I just smile and listen for my name, take it all in. All of the nowhere. Africa. This kid playing the drum, apparently he's this village's version of a mass email because I don't know where the hell these people come from but like a hundred thousand people storm the courtyard, it's like the Rose Bowl on New Year's Day and they've all come to see the circus in town which is namely the big white African and her short clueless American friend.

Molly is still on her propaganda about this backwards indigenous ritual but nobody can hear anything because of all the commotion, all the people, everybody trying to see the one white woman within a thousand miles. Finally Molly comes out she says, Bamuthi, I need you to distract them.

(audience laughter)

JOSEPH: Molly, I'm a poet. And they don't speak English. I ain't got no microphone, no megaphone, no radio, no telephone, whatever, I'm gonna keep them distracted with, I'm withering here, yeah what (yelling) ... Five minutes later. The entire village. I'm surrounded. My heart pounding. Africa. Okay. I don't need to astound them. Only distract. No microphone, no radio, no English. That's cool. That's cool. See, my whole act, to survive, I've become hip-hop empath. I channel the low beginnings, fires burning all over the Bronx, post-Civil Rights, glass ceilings no lights, no moot, just do what you feel to the groove, a dance floor uprising of youth! I just pray that they buy it.

(quickly) It's the future aesthetic, the future's not static, it's moving kinetically manically mimicking cynical smears that works with flares with words the world is this magnanimous moment a future aesthetic a mythic poetic cerebral kisetit it's not in your head or your heart or your feet it exists in all three! Wooh! Okay, they're buying it!

(audience applause)

While I'm cracking them up with my shamrocks, Molly is speaking in a language that I've never heard of. She convinces the council of elders to abandon a centuries-old practice, encourages them to modernize their attitude towards women. Molly extended me. That's how I became an emcee without saying a word. It's ethereal, lyrical, miracle, biblical, spiritual, it's a it's a it's a (scratch) ethereal it's ethereal it's ethereal lyrical (record scratch) it's ethereal lyrical miracle almost biblical (DJ record scratching) Is it real? Oh! Oh my! Thank you.

(audience applause)

BREAK

(music plays)

TEXT: "Opening America's doors to students and professional artists provides the kind of two-way cultural understanding that can break down the barriers that feed hatred and fear." PRESIDENT OBAMA

ART IN EMBASSIES

INTRIGUES

EDUCATES

AND CONNECTS

PLAYING AN AMBASSADORIAL ROLE

AS IMPORTANT AS THAT SERVED

BY TRADITIONAL DIPLOMACY

- SECRETARY OF STATE HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

ART IN EMBASSIES

US DEPARTMENT OF STATE

CREATIVITY

COLLABORATION

CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

ART IN EMBASSIES

IS A LANDMARK PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

BETWEEN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

AND THE AMERICAN AND INTERNATIONAL ART COMMUNITIES

ARTIST: Okay, let's level here so you pull up!

1953

INITIATED BY THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

ESTABLISHED BY PRESIDENT KENNEDY A DECADE LATER

IT'S NOW A GLOBAL PROGRAM

WITH A FOCUS ON CONTEMPORARY VISUAL ARTS

IN OVER 200 DIPLOMATIC VENUES

IN 180 COUNTRIES

PERMANENT COLLECTIONS

TEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS

ARTIST EXCHANGE

PUBLICATIONS

MORE THAN 20,000 ARTISTS

GALLERIES

MUSEUMS

COLLECTORS

UNIVERSITIES & FOUNDATIONS

TODAY THE CORE MISSION HAS BROADENED

FOR A RICHER CULTURAL EXCHANGE

BETWEEN ARTISTS AND HOST COUNTRIES

ARTIST: This work has been in North Carolina, New York, it's on a constant journey. But now it's got a final resting place here in Madagascar.

ART IN EMBASSIES

FOSTERS GREATER UNDERSTANDING

AND CELEBRATES THE CREATIVE SPIRIT

IN ALL OF US

ART IN EMBASSIES

US DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Kennedy image courtesy of John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library

(music plays)

VOICEOVER: Please welcome the honorable Jane Harman, director, president and CEO of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

HARMAN: Well after that opening act, I feel like one of the dullest, pinkest, most boring people on the planet. But I am here to welcome you to what will be a wonderful event and to thank the International Trade Center, the Art in Embassies Program, and the Aspen Institute—my dear friend Elliot Gerson is somewhere down there—for partnering with us on this event.

Let me say something about Beth Dozoretz, the ambassador for the Art in Embassies Program. She came by the Wilson Center recently and said, I have this idea. What would you think about five or six of the greatest artists in America having, or on the planet, having a conversation about art at the Wilson Center. And she could barely get that out, I said, yes! Because what is so little-understood is how important culture is as a foreign policy tool, and how under-utilized it is as a foreign policy tool.

I, some of you may know I served in our Congress for nine terms. I am a recovering politician and left voluntarily, not involuntarily, last year to take up this amazing plum job. And I know from the travels I made in Congress, all over the world to garden spots like Libya, Syria, North Korea, etc., but also to somewhat nicer venues, how critical this program is to showcase what America stands for in our embassies. And how important art is as an education tool, as a way to knit civilization together everywhere in the world and I'll just take this moment to pitch a big audience for more funding for the arts and for the Arts in Embassies program!

(audience applause)

And I thought you should know that just down the road here in the post office building is the headquarters of the NEA, the National Endowment for the Arts, headed by a wonderful free-form called Rocco Landesman. And he told me recently that the funding for the NEA, get this, everyone sit down and focus on this, this is our national arts program, is \$146 million for a country of over \$300 million people. Do the math. That is under fifty cents a person to bring substance, sustenance to the people who live in the United States of America. Did you know that the budget for Skyfall, the new Bond movie, was more than that? So I put that out there and I put out there how critical this program is and how

beautiful, if you were watching the slideshow which I was watching, is the art that these artists whom you will hear from in a minute, bring to us and bring to this program.

And it is very important at a time when the world seems more dangerous than ever and when US embassies look like fortresses, that we can showcase in them some beauty like the beauty that you saw in the slideshow and like the beauty that will be discussed by these artists so as an arts lover myself, who was married for over 30 years a guy named Sidney Harman who always used to say, what a coincidence that the Sidney Harman Hall in Washington has the same name I do, and who quoted poetry at the drop of a hat, I revere this stuff. And yes, Beth, yes. Just ask me again. Thank you very much and please welcome Virginia Shore!

(audience applause)

SHORE: Good evening, thank you all for coming. Thank you, Jane, thank you to the rest of the Wilson Center team, the Aspen team, Elliot, Mary Elenna, Damien Puono. Thank you, Beth, Beth Dozoretz, our director. And I also of course, I want to thank the artists, the five incredible artists that I've luckily had the opportunity to work with over the years and to all the artists in the room who have worked with our program over the years.

The video you just watched gave you a glimpse of Art in Embassies today. Art in Embassies has changed. Over the past decade, our program has grown immensely and we're incredibly proud of the way our program has changed in terms of now we only work we don't only work with American artist we actually work with artists from the host country. It's now a program not just about America, it's about cross-cultural exchange.

We now do artist exchanges. In the past decade we've done over a hundred cultural exchanges and we're going to continue doing the cultural exchanges, this has become a new focus for the program.

Acquisitions has become a new part of our program. We now oversee all the new permanent embassies & consulates around the world. So two-way cultural exchange has become the core of the mission. And that's basically all we wanted to say tonight! Thank you so much for joining us, and we'll go ahead and jump into the conversation, what we're all here for. So connecting us back to our roots, a man who needs no introduction, the director of the Museum of Modern Art, Mister Glenn Lowry.

(audience applause)

(voiceover laughter)

SIKANDER: Do we have an order?

LOWRY: I don't know that we have an order, I think we'll just take it as it comes. And I'll try and remember where everybody is sitting.

(muffled voices, other noises)

LOWRY: So good evening. I'm Glenn Lowry and I'm delighted to be sharing the stage with five extraordinary artists to celebrate not only their work and their achievement and their recognition by the Art in Embassies program, but the fifty years of this remarkable effort on the part of this country to underscore the importance of the arts to us as people and to our dialogue and friendship with those around the world.

It is an important moment especially for me, representing the Museum of Modern Art, because the Art in Embassies program was born in part through the Museum of Modern Art in its very early years. And I just want to say that no one then I'm sure could have envisioned, Beth, what this has grown into. You and your incredible team have done an astounding job and I think the work that you were able to see earlier this evening is a small reflection of the many great things that you have made possible.

So with me tonight are five artists whose work I admire enormously. Cai Guo-Qiang and Cai is in the midst and maybe he'll tell us about it in a moment he's in the midst of preparing for tomorrow that will help celebrate another institution, the Sackler Gallery, as it marks its (silence)—

[Shahzia Sikander is] extraordinary artist from Pakistan now living in the United States who revived, I won't say single-handedly, but who certainly was instrumental in the revival of an old tradition, miniature painting, but investing it with new meanings and new possibilities that continue to resonate today and that have affected an enormous number of artists throughout the Middle East, Pakistan and India.

Jeff Koons who we count as one of our own who, before he became the celebrated artist that he is had a brief moment at the Museum of Modern Art where his work is still legendary but who has gone on to be one of the most celebrated and important artists working anywhere in the world and whose sculpture, paintings and ideas form the backbone of an intense conversation about surrealism as well as pop art can be in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Carrie Mae Weems who's been a voice for the power of women, of identity, and of race, who's tackled some of the most difficult issues around and who's always done so with an elegance and grace. I count as a great friend.

And Kiki Smith, who has managed in her work to discover mysteries and spirits and ideas that we didn't know existed. Who, like Carrie, is willing to tackle questions of identity, and of gender but who also has brought forth the pleasures of thinking about the environment and ecology and whose work never ceases to surprise me. So you can imagine how honored I am to be here.

So let me start, Cai, with a question to you. You embody, I think, much of what this program stands for— cultural exchange and the openness to the ideas from different places and different peoples. What is it like to be preparing a major work for the Mall here in Washington?

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: Because the project I'm working on is co-organized by Art in Embassies and also the Sackler Gallery...

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: And since their birthdays fall on the holiday season I decided to choose a Christmas tree. And then on this forty-foot-tall Christmas tree I'm putting over 2,000 fireworks on the tree. And during the explosion there will be free admission.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: So the first explosion lasts 1.5 seconds and goes (noises) from bottom to top.

(audience laughter)

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: And when the smoke clears slightly there will be a tree lighting ceremony where the smoke (silence) for five seconds.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: And for the third time, when the smoke completely clears, all the fireworks will go 'boom' and then you see a clear tree.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: So I'm hoping the tree will look like a film negative of a Christmas tree (silence) day.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: And I'm hoping at the end of the explosion, you have two trees: one real tree, another cloud smoke tree that's drifting away. So we have one real tree and one virtual tree.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: So I'm praying for the wind tomorrow.

(audience laughter)

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: So if the wind is really high and the smoke drifts off really quickly, your eyeballs will have to roll more quickly too.

(audience laughter)

LOWRY: What time will it take place, Cai?

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: Three in the afternoon.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: Don't be late!

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: Because it's incredibly hard to get permits in Washington, DC! So there's lots of traffic control hurdles to be leapt over.

(audience laughter)

LOWRY: Three o'clock! If you're working, take time off. If you're not working, be there, it will be fantastic. Jeff, you've had, you've worked all over the world, your sculpture is legendary. How did you come about selecting the work that you did for the embassy in Beijing?

KOONS: Glenn, I thought about, which pieces at that moment were finished, available. And the Tulips just seemed like it would be a wonderful choice for the reflection pond. And so, myself and my wife, we offered the Tulips to go and so it was agreed that the embassy would show Tulips. But I have to say—when I saw the photographs of the work installed, and I saw the large scholar stones that were around the piece, I was so moved. It was the most ideal setting I could imagine. Not just with the architecture and the reflection pond, but then to have these large scholar stones there. But it was just organic, thinking about work that would symbolize optimism, you know, the Tulips creates like a rainbow, and it's, you know, an optimistic piece.

LOWRY: They're part of your celebration series, aren't they?

KOONS: Ah yes, yeah.

LOWRY: Do you want to talk a little bit about that, because I think that's one of the great achievements that you've been working on now for quite a while, and what's the genesis of that series and what does it try to do?

KOONS: I would have to say my work in general but I would think with the celebration series I started to really try to focus on just connecting with archetypal imagery. And to just follow my interests and focus on those interests. But everything else has an aspect of tied to a cyclical year so tulips are kind of a symbol of spring. Other works from that series, a hanging heart could maybe be Valentine's Day, or you could associate a cracked egg or something maybe Easter. But an aspect of cyclical time. But everything is a little larger, a little mythic in scale. And so Tulips was part of that series.

LOWRY: Carrie, I was struck by something that you said at some point and I can't even remember where and when but in talking about your work where you were discussing that you've come to address issues of love and other matters, but your work is always about race. And you... and Carrie's work, if you don't know it, often uses text and images, images that you take yourself but find, texts that you write and find as well. How did you come to use these different sort of almost intersecting strategies, the word and the image?

WEEMS: That's a long story. I probably think more of it is you know I think that my work is really focused in the area of unrequited love. I think all those other issues, issues of race and gender and so forth are really subordinate to this other, deeper idea, really complex idea about the struggle and the battle for love and affection and desire and need and want. So I'm always sort of grappling with those ideas. But early on when I was a student I had a really wonderful teacher, we fought a great deal which is, I have a history of fighting with lots of people—

LOWRY: She may look mild-mannered up here but—

WEEMS: (laughs) But we had these really sort of great talks about photography and one day you know he said to me, so what's the about. And I said, it's obvious, you can tell, and a picture's worth a thousand words. And he said yes, that's true, but which thousand are you talking about specifically?

(laughter) i

WEEMS: And so it was a question, it was a question, it was a challenge, and I've been for a long time then making work based in image and text. Though for the last many years actually I haven't, I haven't really been doing that so much, though I continue to write a great deal in relationship to the work.

LOWRY: You've been doing a lot of video work.

WEEMS: I've been doing a lot of video work. And I think actually that gives me that opportunity to play with ideas about sound and voice. And I have a chance to work with musicians and of course in this context, in the American embassy context, you know, artists were very very important, musicians were very important in the early years of Arts in Embassies programs around the world. The sort of great great music of people like Dizzy Gillespie and Armstrong and et cetera, they were really really important. That book, *Satchmo Blows Away the World*, was absolutely critical in understanding the role of artists, music, literature, in (silence) in cultural diplomacy. And so it's sort of wonderful that I get a chance now to work with musicians as I do my own work and tomorrow night thanks to Virginia, Virginia Shore, who I've now known for many many years, I love working with this program, I get a chance to work with the amazing artist and pianist Jason Moran. So we sort of work out some ideas around sound and image and word.

LOWRY: And I do think we should give Virginia a huge round of applause for the work she does.

(applause)

LOWRY: But pause for a moment: Madagascar.

WEEMS: I know! Amazing, right? You know, I've always wanted to go there too.

LOWRY: And did you get to go?

WEEMS: No, I haven't.

LOWRY: But your work is there—

WEEMS: My work is there and so I'm happy with that. However it is also in Mali so that's fabulous and I've been to Mali. And in fact the images that are used in the embassy there are photographs that were made in this great great great great ancient city of (?) in northern Mali and I'm very pleased that the work is there and it's (silence)

LOWRY: Shahzia, you have the pleasure of being from Pakistan, living in the states, but having your work as part of the Art in Embassies program in Pakistan. Did you think about what work would be appropriate for the embassy?

SIKANDER: Actually the work that I did, I definitely thought about it.

LOWRY: Do you want to share the title with us, because I think it's important.

SIKANDER: 'I Am Also Not My Own Enemy'. And you know I think a lot of my work is really about translation, the distance between the original or the idea of the original and what may be, an interpretation or something even. And what is that distance. And I think even in this particular work, 'I Am Also Not My Own Enemy,' it opens up that dialogue. Like who is the enemy here or not. And it also refers actually to Mirza Ghalib, a phrase, a poet, text borrowed from his language. And again it's in Urdu but it's written in English. And the way it's painted also is it references the U.S. colors.

LOWRY: The what has always struck me as so interesting about your work is how you've taken this older language, the language of miniature painting, and found new ways to invest it with stories. Where did the stories come from? Are they personal, are they...do you find them in literature? How do you how do you think about your work as it relates to the present?

SIKANDER: I think as an artist as an individual as a person I think a lot of the information surrounds us and it's how much you're absorbing, so a lot of it is culled from newspapers, from history books, from other artists' work, from literature, everything, I think, culture at large. And it's also about how much of it becomes part of your own language. So I think I'm interested in that process.

Like, what does it mean to own something, the act of ownership, because again the interest in miniature painting was removed from a culture specificity. It wasn't because one was from Pakistan or studying there that you had to do miniature painting. It was a very objective, non-nostalgic interesting in learning something, in understanding its context, its history and then getting interested in sort of a floodgate that happened. There was sort of so much to process, to juxtapose, as well as see it through the lens of the colonial history, too.

So I think there's not one place through which I'm accessing ideas but several places and a lot of it is create—imagination you know and how can you make something that might communicate to a larger audience. How do you make work which is compelling, and how do you define what is compelling, also? So I think at the end of it it's also about communication. How do you make work that can communicate? And then translation, like, what is translation in that respect.

LOWRY: Is the issue of translation, Kiki, for you, sorry (laughs) the issue, first of all I should say Kiki is one of the most generous artists in the world. She's generous with her time, as is every artist here, but

there's I think in her work a profound generosity of spirit and something I'm always struck by, so much of your work feels like it's giving itself to someone else. To all of us who get to look at it. Do you think of issues of translation, of how you, either how you absorb other ideas from cultures or ideas from literature or how you transfer your work, as it were, from something very private to something that enters the public sphere?

SMITH: Well ... you know, we're just fluid. Things are just coming in and out and of and some moments we have like the net's tighter that we trap something, it stays in our consciousness and then kind of flows out of our consciousness again. You know that's one you know creativity is fluid and it's a vehicle you know like it seems to me that art is a space that keeps like demanding that the depth of our human gets to have expression and particularly within the bounds of like societies that are often restrictive and constrictive. You know, that art keeps like chopping out space and has this ability to move and be fluid from different cultures.

I mean like I would say, I am part or I inherit the entire history of creativity in the world and that's my lineage and I have access through that lineage. And you go to attraction and I think like love and I think a lot of art is about gift-making, it is about gift-making. And it is about trying to like synthesize something outside of yourself that you can then like reflect and look at. But it is also something that has a capacity for other people to have their own authentic experience too, and embrace. So you know it is like water and water and we are essentially I would say creative and technological beings and besides that you know we're just things that fluid will go through. You know so it's most natural that we make creative you know have some way of making creative expression.

Certainly within the context of the embassies, you know, we are all extremely fortunate and also the people working. This was my thing, like, the people working, it's most important that America has this, like, history, problematic history, with visual arts and a suspicion of visual arts and it is just cause of our history. You know but you know so it hasn't been you know so supported in the governmental ways like in the broad culture like that but it has always been supported by individuals because and you know this is one of the great contributions we have here and I forgot what I was saying because I always forget what I'm saying but anyway that's nothing (laughs)

LOWRY: I should say, I should say, speaking of lineages, you come from a remarkable lineage of artists. Your sister Seton, who's a terrific photographer, is here with us tonight and you're both here because you're celebrating your father's hundredth birthday, is that right?

SMITH: Yeah.

LOWRY: At the National Gallery, so (applauds)

(audience applause)

SMITH: My father is Tony Smith and on Saturday there's a talk at the National Gallery about his work, by some people from the museum, but also the artist Charlie Ray is speaking on his work which is for us the greatest privilege.

WEEMS: Well you know that's one of the greatest things about being on a in an environment like this that this kind of program brings together that not only do we get a chance to revel in our own sort of world, you get a chance I get a chance to be with Kiki, who, you know, I adore! And I want to consume your work! There are pieces that you've made over the years that I literally want to eat. They're absolutely that I feel so lucky that I have the opportunity to be with each of you, learn about each of you, knowing each of you, and to that extent then that there's this level of community that exists amongst us that I think is really sort of extraordinary. And again I think that it's these kind of programs that allow us really to come together because for the most part we're all very very busy in our own studios working.

SMITH: But we are as artists international by just fundamentally, you know, outside of any structure, we exist in a fluid, international—

WEEMS: That's right, that you are home. That you are home and that you feel the ability to work almost anywhere. Rosa Luxemburg said, I am home where in the world there are clouds and birds and human tears. Which I absolutely love. So that I never feel like there's any great distance, even though we talk about these ideas about translation, meaning, who owns something. That you know that there's something really wonderful about the ability to sort of to break through those artificial boundaries of construct. To exist in the world as human, right? Not man, not woman but as human, as artists, as people that are deeply interested in the experience of living and making.

SIKANDER: Yeah, and I think at that level we don't require translation.

(audience applause)

SIKANDER: And that really is the interface of art, that it naturally doesn't require translation, no boundaries. And that, you know, it's harder to define and put down and probably harder to digest.

WEEMS: And yet and yet artists are considered dangerous.

LOWRY: If you've been about Shah's work—

SMITH: Not everywhere—

LOWRY: It can be dangerous!

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: So back in the days only diplomats get to jet-set all over the world and especially in China, if you're an important diplomat you might have a chance to go to several countries. So when I mentioned to a Chinese diplomat that I've been to over 30 countries, he was absolutely shocked! 'How could you!' But nowadays, all artists are like diplomats. They go everywhere.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: Well, we should probably talk about the role of art in diplomacy—

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: He made a mistake, but I didn't (laughs)

(audience laughter)

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: So let's talk about the role of art in diplomacy.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: Back in October, I was fortunate enough to win the Praemium Imperiale in Japan and Glenn Lowry actually announced my laureate-ship in MoMA a while back—

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: And at the time, AC Macky(?) gave me two outfits, one for the ceremony in Japan and one for the ceremony in New York.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: But never would I have thought that Sino-Japanese relations would have reached the highest tension during that time over the bickering of the ownership of the Senkaku Islands.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: So over 4,000 activities and events that were planned by the Chinese and Japanese governments were completely cancelled.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: But I still went to Japan.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: Because it was the first time that a Chinese-born artist was given this award.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: So after I went, the Japanese organizers were very pleased.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: And the Chinese ambassador was kind enough to come.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: Even though they cancelled all these cultural exchange activities, they still came to my awards ceremony.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: So during the day, the foreign offices of both countries would sort of yell at each other and say, no, these islands are ours and these islands are ours, but in the evening they all sit down together and have a nice dinner.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: So sometimes art can do things that politics cannot.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

(audience applause)

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: So the Chinese diplomats were kind enough to come and were, 'oh, this is only art'

(audience laughter)

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: Because art is always a very emotional exchange and experience between different human beings.

LOWRY: No, I think that's said so beautiful, Cai, you know, one of the things that all of us who have the privilege of working in the arts know is that there's a community that we live in. That what Kiki and Carrie were talking about, that we live in this community and it doesn't actually matter where we are, we are always connected to interesting people who will who even if they have different political positions, share a common belief in the value of art. And I think that's what the Art in Embassies program constantly underscores.

Jeff, I wonder, you've worked in some of the most interesting places, you've tackled Versailles, for instance, brought it to its heels with your installation. When you do those kinds of projects—and for those of you who don't know, Jeff, probably five years ago, now, I'm guessing it was more or less that—

KOONS: Yes, I think it was around 2008?2008, Justine?

(laughter)

LOWRY: —was invited to do an installation in Versailles, one of the most hallowed spaces in French. And if anyone knows the French, they're not really good about sharing their cultural prowess with the rest of the world, you know, especially with Americans, who they see as upstarts. But there you were. What was it like? Did you see yourself in a way as an ambassador for the United States there?

KOONS: I think artists always and people that are here people that are participating, that's the main drive, you want to participate. And so when you're young, you get together with your friends, you talk about art, and you to your desire you participate. And art's about connections, and the more connections, the more powerful it is.

So when I was younger I would think about what Louis Quatorze, what Louis the 14<sup>th</sup>, what fantasies he would have when, to be able to have complete economic and political freedom to create something. And we all have these freedoms every day to and art's really about how much freedom that you give to yourself. But what maybe his fantasies would be. And so, when I went to Versailles, I was just very very open, what would seem like a natural piece to place in different rooms.

But Glenn, my experience with art, in a nutshell, it's a vehicle that lets you have self-acceptance. You participate and learning to know yourself, and once you have a sense of yourself you automatically want to go outward. And you want to have a dialogue about everything that's external. And you know it leads you to have everything in play, it's about all of these connections. And it's about other people and acceptance of others. So automatically you're in this dialogue that you want also to have more and more open to you and that openness comes from acceptance. Accepting everything around you and letting it be in play, to let it be in dialogue. And that's where art finds its interest, its information, its ability to connect.

LOWRY: One of the, this evening is about cultural exchange and cultural diplomacy and it seems to me that one of the places where that exchange occurs is often in the form of a biennial. Those exhibitions that occur every other year, sometimes they're every third year, and in the case of some, every fifth year but they bring together artists from around the world often, for a moment, you know, in a place that sometimes might not be exposed to recent work by a number of people and I'm interested in how those of us who are consumers at biennials find them fascinating because they're, I don't want to call them one-stop shopping, but they provide a unique moment to take a pulse.

And I wonder what it's like from the point of view of an artist, to be part of a biennial. I think, Shahzia, you're working for the Sharjah Biennial. This is a one of the newer biennials, it takes place in Sharjah in the Gulf, in March if I am correct. What's that like, and what kind of work are you doing for that? And how do you feel about being you meet other artists is it does it engage you in a different in a way that's different than when you're just doing a show in New York or in Los Angeles?

SIKANDER: Absolutely. I think especially the Sharjah Biennial because, you know, being in New York, you are pretty much separate from that region. Versus sort of living nearby or close by. So that's one aspect. The other is that I have been to UAE several times but not necessarily to engage with the context of Sharjah and the foundation itself. So this time I really was much more open to understanding its history in the region and its relationship to Pakistan and its relationship to other Asian countries because there's lots of migrant workers, lots of people, ex-pats that also bring to life that area.

So all of those things are swimming in one's head, which is not necessarily going to happen if you're working in the studio and making your next body of work, or putting a show up. So definitely you think you have to shift gears and think differently. So I'm doing a variety of projects, since my primary practice

is drawing there's a lot of new drawings after visiting and exploring Sharjah and looking through lots of imagery and its history. Few years back, you know, few decades ago very different, so it's... and then I'm doing like a multi-channel video animation work, I'm working with another musician for the sound and also working on a film project which will be shot there in two weeks, on site. So there's a lot of relationship to the location, engaging with the people there, engaging much more with the fabric of the host country or the host society in that respect.

It is about acceptance. It's also about you know finding ways to engage through a different tempo, rhythm, and then also learning in the process more and how to create that boundary that's going to create something meaningful between that particular engagement as well as the larger platform which is well-visited as we know by globally, through everybody. So I think not respect—biennials as platforms are very critical because they do the space at least for contemporary art where we see a variety of things which we don't necessarily are privy to, being in just in the US or New York.

WEEMS: I think it's also unique, the thing that's important and I think that this issue underscores what you were just saying the you know the you know you have to, to do what we do you have to love it. Like you really have to like I am a slave to my work. It tells me what to do, it gets me up in the morning, and it tells me when I am going to go to bed at night. You know, I mean, it rules my life and there are parts of it that I find absolutely maddening and there are parts of it that absolutely save me. You know, art has saved my life on more than one occasion.

And how we participate in the world I think and this thing called diplomacy is a very complex thing. It's not a static thing and that it exists on many many many many different levels. You know, from this way in which Kiki was talking about, the way in which things are simply flowing, information, ideas, emotion, concept, being, that these things are flowing back and forth through many different channels.

So on the one hand there's that this emotional thing, this thing that we are attempting to live through, that we are attempting to communicate through. Volumes of stored information, sensibility, concept, being, is one thing—the way in which we work as artists. So you know that you can be that I can be in Mexico or I can be in South Africa and the artist and the people assume that the work was made there. That it is transcended where it was made. That it's now simply about what the material is and what the material is trying to get at. That it becomes really much more important.

So that there's that aspect of diplomacy, that you are becoming a part of a larger world, that you're breaking down barriers and boundaries. Which is really what we're talking about, right? How do we how do we disrupt the boundaries, the bridges that separate us from one another? And how do we do that in an elegant and challenging way? In a way that is respectful of the difference between the group of us?

You know, so that on the one hand I have the extraordinary privilege to work with FAPE on the one hand, with Art in Embassies here, but there's nothing like being in Rome and making a body of work and having a group of Romans come to me and tell me that this is the first time that they've understood their city in this way, and that they're shocked and surprised. It's something else that happens now, some other kind of information, some other kind of dialogue is now possible between me and that

group of people because something else has happened, you know, that something else is broken, that something else has been built up, actually. And that I think is exciting.

So the diplomacy exists in many many ways and that each in our own way I think direct it. Control it. Manifest it. Speak it. Live it.

SMITH: That's something nice too about the Art in Embassies is that the diversity of voices or of practices or of some sort of manifestations of things. They don't have to go together and I think that's one of like our great American heritages of living in this country now as artists and in particular for us as women artists, our generation, that we have had such a fortunate that we've taken such a fortunate position that we get to do our work. But that it's really large, the space that art can occupy.

And that it's not only to make cultural understanding. You know, it's also to stand in that things are incomprehensible, enigmatic, not able to be quantified or understood, they're idiosyncratic, and they're out—they're outside and, you know, and that it's really important to have models of incoherence and models of difference and you know not make this sort of mushy, happy happy, you know everybody in the world's happy with each other culturally. And but but it allows art allows the space for that. You know, when many places in international diplomacy or whatever are intolerant of the not-knowing space. And that's a great thing that art affords and is a model for the world, I think.

KOONS: Kiki, if I could just say something, you know when we speak about culture too, you know, culture can be such a large kind of word, but in a way it's just like a personality. And it's a personality of a group of people. And art is an experience that really just happens in a singular viewer and that brings us back to that you know nations are made up of individuals and we all contribute to this kind of being of a whole. And then also interacting with each other. That's really about individuals relating to each other and communicating and having a dialogue, one-on-one.

LOWRY: Speaking of a dialogue, this is supposed to be about exchange and I think we should take a few minutes to see if there are any questions from those of you in the audience! For any one of these wonderful artists who are sharing the evening with us. So don't be shy! If you have a question—do we have a process for questions or do I just...people have been writing them down?

(voices offstage)

LOWRY: You know what, you know what? I like taking it as it flies. So if you have a question, raise your hand and I'll call on you and just speak loudly.

SMITH: I'll say something really—oh, no, you've got it—no I just want to say something really quick, because we're all artists but like Cai-san is my curator, he has curated me in two international exhibitions, of my own museum shows in his museums because you know he as all artists and all human beings can have many facets to you know we get to be citizens as artists, we get to be artists, we get to do whatever else we're doing. But he's someone in a unique position that has made his own museums, has taken his own museums, has occupied his own museums, so he is a very important cultural model I think of the complexity of what an artist can be today. Anyway, sorry.

LOWRY: No, that was great, Kiki!

SMITH: But he's great!

LOWRY: He is great! In the back there was a question... I think, yes?

(audience member asks a question, unintelligible)

LOWRY: Did everyone hear, did everyone hear that question?

AUDIENCE: No ...

LOWRY: She asked if any of these artists but I think she was directing it perhaps at Jeff in particular, when they create a work that might go to an embassy or abroad, are they trying to send a specific message?

(audience member continues question)

LOWRY: Carrie?

WEEMS: Well that's not my case I mean I think I am I just make work. I make work that I'm really deeply interested in that really me and then I think it's been the thing that's been interesting is and then there's a real consideration about what will be the best work for a certain embassy so that out of the many many many pieces that I've produced over the years maybe only a few of them really speak in I think in a certain way that allows that work to go maybe to Madagascar or Liberia or the US mission in New York. So no I haven't I've never made anything with the mission in mind, I haven't had that experience but maybe others here have.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: So my work was probably trying to do something like you had mentioned. When Art in Embassies invited me to create a piece for the embassy in Beijing, I was very excited.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: So to be honest with you, no Chinese government agency has ever commissioned me to create a work for their government buildings so yeah Americans were the first to ask.

(laughter)

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: So I used gunpowder to depict an eagle and a pine tree branch.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: So these two things from the two different countries are creating a relationship with each other.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: But when artists work in the world, in different countries, like everyone here has mentioned, everyone has their little tricks. It's like being a diplomat, everyone have their own set of skills.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: So last December when I was working in Doha, in Qatar, because it's in the Arab world and I felt mystified by it, I was very worried

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: So I brought my team and stayed there for 50 days.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: And I tried to work with volunteers from local communities

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: And when I tried to write fragile in Arabic, the museum staff held my hand and taught me how to write it

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: And because I've invested so much of my own energy there, when I wanted to put gunpowder on the Abaya robes that local women wear, the museum was very tolerant.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: (laughs) Because the museum knows that I'm very serious about what I do.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: And they know that I'm trying to create a dialogue with their culture.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: And then I made a video piece documenting how Arabian horses are raised in their specialized breeding and training centers, that these horses be artificially inseminated and then they would go for a very strict fitness and beauty regimen every day where they swim laps in a swimming pool and then run on a treadmill. And then you get showered, shampooed, massaged, beautified with all different ointments—

LOWRY: It's good to be a horse in some places!

(audience laughter)

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: And when I made another installation called Flying Together with a flock of falcons lifting a camel, the museum staff were very supportive and helped finish the work.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: So if you start by respecting these cultural differences, earnestly try to initiate a dialogue with different people, then people will learn to accept you.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: And people learn to respect you and trust you and give you creative freedom.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: And I was hoping that my art practice would influence the young artists from the region so they can see how to transform their cultural icons into contemporary works of art.

GUO-QIANG: (speaking Mandarin)

TRANSLATOR: They also influence me deeply and allow me to contemplate from a new angle the relationship between the Arab world and the rest of the world.

LOWRY: I think actually on that note of tolerance and I do think one of the great things that art does is build bridges and create conditions that allow for tolerance, generosity, love requited or otherwise, to take place. We should recognize, celebrate and thank Kiki Smith, Carrie Mae Weems, Jeff Koons, Shazia Sikander and Cai Guo-Qiang, five remarkable artists who will be honored tomorrow, for sharing this evening with us.

(applause)

VOICEOVER: Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Mister Elliot Gerson, Executive Vice President of Policy and Public Programs for the Aspen Institute.

GERSON: Well this, this I think is a doubly perilous assignment, first of all to end that incredible, brilliant exchange and also to separate all of you from what will be a wonderful reception. But someone had to have this assignment. So I will be brief. But on behalf of the Aspen Institute, the Art in Embassies program at the State Department, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center, I'd like to say just a few words, largely of thanks to all of you for joining us here tonight to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this remarkable program.

We know that you couldn't help but enjoy Marc Bamuthi Joseph's amazing, exhilarating performance that we saw, and I think all of us will long remember that incredibly insightful dialogue that we all listened to. I mean, just just you know, the thrill to have that kind of exuberance of talent, together at one time in one place and be able to eavesdrop on it, I think was very very special.

(audience applause)

GERSON: But we are here to celebrate a wonderful anniversary, the fiftieth anniversary of this fabulous program and I've had a chance to see its magic in other cities around the world. In that regard, I'd like to particularly thank Beth Dozoretz, who it's been my pleasure to know and work with for gosh probably about 15 years, Beth, and more recently, Virginia Shore. We were just in Tokyo recently for an Aspen Institute sponsored forum on cultural diplomacy. And they've just done an extraordinary job in running this program, absolutely brilliantly during a time of obvious challenge for any kind of cultural fundraising. But also deserve special thanks and Virginia mentioned this for the insight they had to include contemporary art from the host countries, in addition to American artists to foster the kind of cross-cultural dialogue and exchange that we just got a glimpse.

And it's actually that kind of vision that enabled Art in Embassies to play such a significant role in the recent forum that we had in Japan under the theme of the art of peace building and reconciliation. And we did have Virginia there, we also were able to entertain our guests from all around the world in our ambassador's residence which was complemented so wonderfully by works from this great organization. And so it was really special and I'm sure for any of you who've had opportunities to see the actual effect of the work in other embassies and missions around the world, it's really remarkable.

We had that event in Tokyo after having it in several other places in previous years including Spain and France, in Oman, and I'm glad to say I think next year will actually bring the magic of this kind of cultural diplomacy event to Congo and if there's a place in the world that needs the magic and power and peace of art, it's certainly Congo.

The Aspen Institute, and many of you may not realize this, but when we were founded in 1950, art was very much at our core, art and music and literature. And in the decades since we've evolved increasingly at least in outside perception as an institute focused on public policy and foreign policy, domestic international policy but and it seems like a small world but about seven years ago largely under the inspiration of the late Sydney Harman, one of our trustees, we brought art back really to center stage at the Institute. And not art in terms of performance or display, Sydney used to say that art is not, it's not decoration, it's not entertainment, it's fundamental to everything we do and who we are.

So in our programs in the arts, what we do is not just show art or give artists a stage or an opportunity to read or perform. We actually engage artists in everything we do. Whether it's discussing refugee issues or whether it's discussing education in American public schools, because we believe the perspective of artists is so fundamental and so important.

So that is what we do. It's now my privilege to oversee a suite of arts programs, including one run by Damian Puono(?) who's here tonight that deals with cultural diplomacy but also a spectacular one run by the dancer Damian Woetzel and we're about to launch one run by the wonderful playwright Anna Devere Smith. So art is very much a part of what we are all about now.

Finally, and I did promise you you would be able to get to this reception, I'd like to recognize a few people who made all of this possible, other than those of course I've already mentioned. Damian

Puono(?) but also Maria Elena Amatangelo and Agnes Pour(?) for their contribution to the planning at this event. Welmoed Laanstra, for Arts in Embassies who helped coordinate the event. And of course, the Woodrow Wilson International Center itself especially Jane who mentioned that we jealously share her with the Wilson Center, she's also a trustee of the Institute. Sharon McCarter, Marie-Stella Gatzoulis, for facilitating logistical and outreach efforts. And of course the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center for hosting us.

So now, it is my pleasure to ask you please join us at our reception, thank you very much for being here.

(applause)

(music plays over credits)