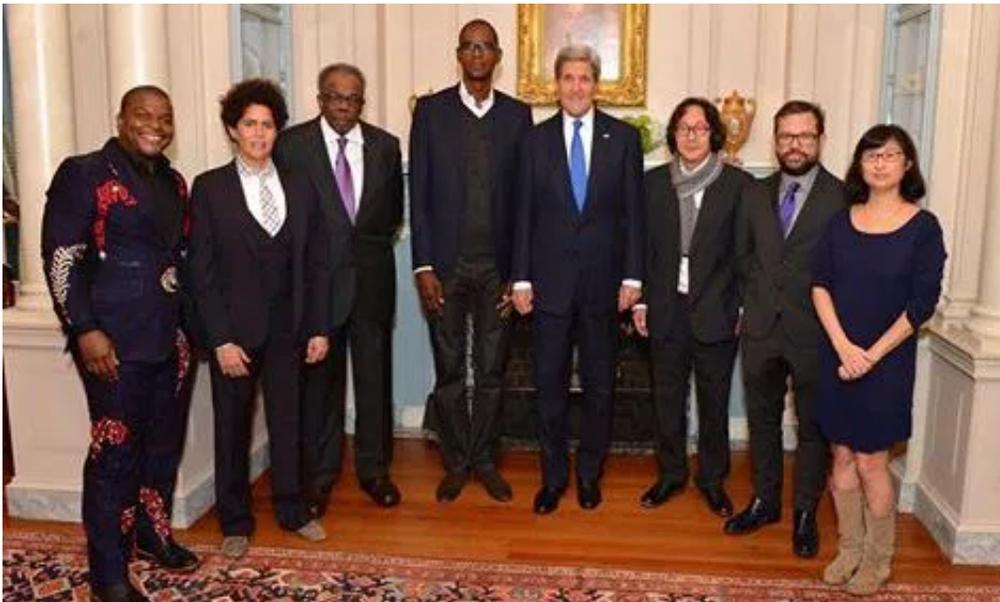


The Diplomatist

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The Power of Art: Celebrating the 2014 Department of State Medal of Arts Winners.

Posted on [January 26, 2015](#) by [John Pope](#) [Leave a comment](#)



“There are many ways to trumpet the virtues of an open society, but none as subtle, as compelling, or as elegant as well-chosen art.” Sec. Kerry January 21, 2015

Last week the Department of State (<http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/01/236177.htm>) awarded the Medal of Arts (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/style-blog/wp/2015/01/21/seven-artists-awarded-state-department-medal-of-arts-for-cultural-diplomacy/>) to 7 visual artists for their contributions to increasing global understanding through their work. All of the artists are active contributors to

the Art in Embassies (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Art-in-Embassies-US-Department-of-State/192680544079956>) program (<http://art.state.gov/>) which began back in 1963 and helps bring contemporary american art to embassies around the world. The Medal of Arts award and the Art in Embassies program show a commitment to the idea that art can help us bridge national and cultural divides.

To celebrate that belief here are the seven artists and some of the work:

The first recipient was Sam Gilliam (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sam_Gilliam) who was awarded a Medal of Arts Lifetime Achievement Award for his numerous contributions to the Art in Embassies program. His paintings are in over twenty countries and have been noted for their exploration of color and form.



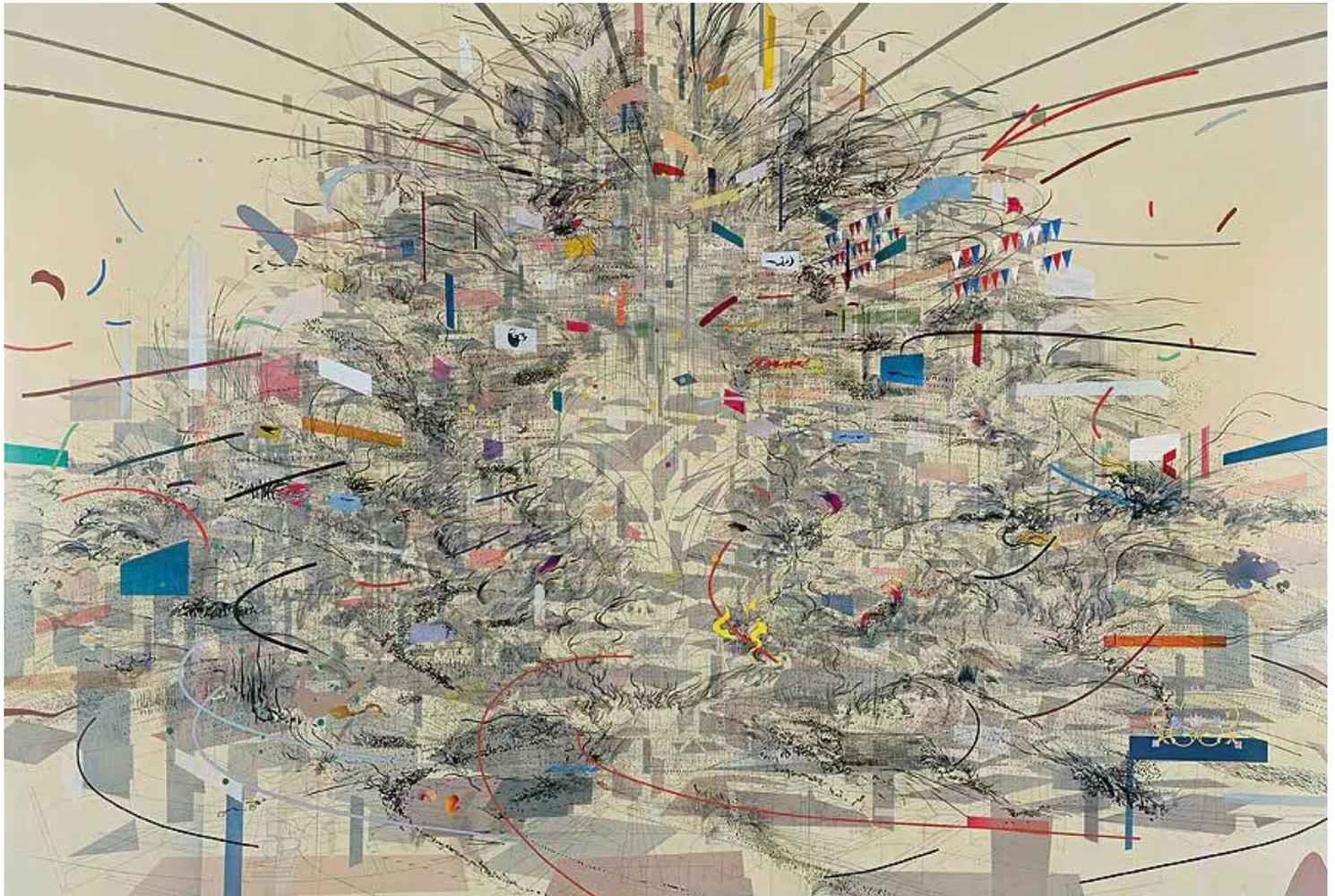
The next award went to Xu Bing (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xu_Bing), a Chinese born American artist. Xu uses much of his work to bridge the cultural divide between China and America. To that end there are displays of his *Monkeys Grasping the Moon* in both Washington and Beijing. The work is based on a chinese folktale about monkeys attempting to steal the moon and made up of the word monkey in 21 different languages.



The artist Mark Bradford (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_Bradford) uses art to explore the various perspectives and experiences in American life. In the American Embassy in Stockholm he displayed a video called "Practice" where he attempts to play basketball in a hoop dress.



Julie Mehretu (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julie_Mehretu) paints works that are complex and intricate. The embassy in Madrid has one of her paintings, as does the embassy in Addis Ababa, the same city where Julie was born.



The sculptor and experimental artist Pedro Reyes

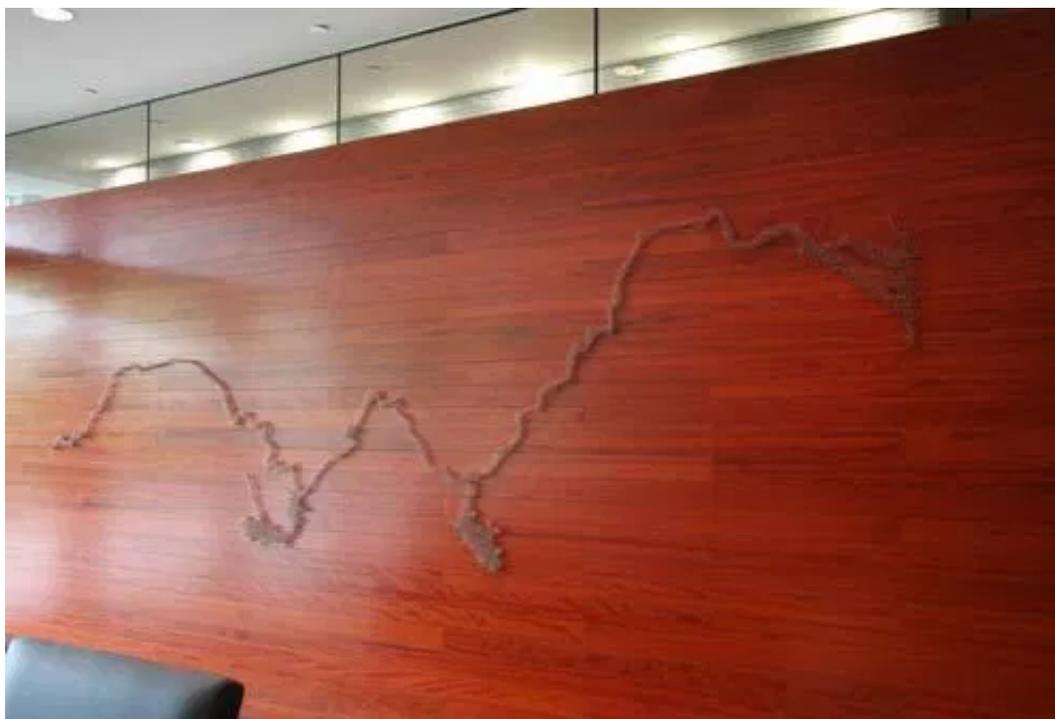
([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pedro_Reyes_\(artist\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pedro_Reyes_(artist)))' work is varied and exciting. Currently he has a sculpture depicting the inner ear (<http://www.pedroreyes.net/ear.php?szLang=en&Area=work>) in the US consulate in Tijuana. In his remarks Secretary Kerry referred to it as "a poignant reminder that people everywhere need to listen to one another. Pedro once said that art is supposed to make people talk – not about the work itself but "about the discussions that are yet to come."



You might recognize Kehinde Wiley (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kehinde_Wiley)'s work from shows like Empire. He paints epic portraits of people of color with fantastic and colorful backgrounds. He also has been a big supporter of the Art in Embassies program providing paintings for embassies in the Dominican Republic, Britain, and Jamaica.



And last but not least Maya Lin (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maya_Lin). The creator of the Vietnam War Memorial here in Washington, DC as well as numerous other works. Currently displayed in the Beijing Embassy is her *Pin-River*, a unique depiction of the Yangtze, seen below:



All of these works and artists tell a unique story of how America perceives itself and wants to be perceived by the world. They serve as jumping off points for discussion and as unifying points of shared humanity. They are a testament to the ideas of cultural diplomacy, and it is great to see them so awarded.

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