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The
GOLDEN
DOOR



October 31, 2020 – January 16, 2021

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The Golden Door exhibition examines the complex histories and cultural identities that define and enrich contemporary America. "I lift my lamp beside the golden door!" is the closing line of Emma Lazarus's poem engraved on the Statue of Liberty's plaque welcoming newcomers to the U.S. The artists' works explore their varied cultural heritages and experiences. Illuminating their personal and collective experiences while also exploring the concept of displacement, the deep divides of our history as a nation, and the enduring idea of the American dream.

CURATORS



Dr. Robin Jaffee Frank conceived and planned The Golden Door exhibition, having formerly served as chief curator at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT and curator at the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT.



Roger Mudre, Gallery Director, Silvermine Arts Center, New Canaan, CT.



Barbara O'Brien, Milwaukee-based independent curator and critic and former executive director of the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, Missouri.

**POINTS OF LIGHT –
ARTISTS AS GUIDES IN THE GOLDEN DOOR**

Barbara O'Brien

The Golden Door exhibition features works by contemporary artists exploring the American experience of immigration and migration. "I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"—the closing line from "The New Colossus," a poem by Emma Lazarus (1849–1887) engraved on a plaque on the Statue of Liberty—provides the eponymous title for this exhibition, whose theme is as relevant as tomorrow's news headlines.

Born in New York City in 1849, Lazarus came from a Sephardic Jewish family who immigrated to the United States from Portugal around the time of the American Revolution. As part of a fundraiser for the building of the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, Lazarus was asked to write and donate an original poem to be auctioned off. She initially declined, but later used the opportunity to express her concern for the plight of Russian refugee immigrants, whose arrival in New York City in 1881 she witnessed firsthand.¹ Her sonnet includes the iconic lines, "'Give me your tired, your poor / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,'" indicating empathy, yet the poem reflects some condescension, too. Lazarus' image of the immigrants a "tempest-tost" and yearning to breathe free "reflected one aspect of the spirit of her age; her picture of them as wretched refuse mirrored another. ... From one point of view, the immigrant symbolized the force of freedom pulling men through a golden door. From another they looked poor and huddled and

unattractive.”² How the language of “The New Colossus” is understood in today’s political and social climate is as varied as the diverse works of art on view in the Silvermine Galleries.

The Golden Door is neither a historic survey nor a global appraisal of the state of art by immigrants or about immigration. Much has been and continues to be written in both scholarly and popular literature on this topic. This exhibition showcases eleven visual artists whose practice expresses their varied cultural heritages and experiences as part of a complex tapestry of societal concerns. Some of the artists respond directly to recent debates about immigration and cultural assimilation, and the politics of inclusion and exclusion. Others present personal narratives and peel away layers of family legacies, histories of forced migration, and the complex role that art has played in their life as they find their place in America. These works of art are the bridge by which we are invited to experience the artists’ point of view, personal story, or call for action.

While all of the artists whose work is on view in *The Golden Door* currently reside in the United States, their countries of birth include Argentina, Iran, India, Japan, Taiwan, Syria, the United States of America, and the United Kingdom. These eleven artists comprise a

set of points of light in a clear night sky, creating a constellation of stars by which we might be guided toward a better understanding of the issues and experiences of our time. They are grappling with the theme of immigration, yes, but more broadly, with the reality of being an outsider, a wayfarer, or a voice that challenges the politics of a society with an ongoing, complicated relationship with immigrants. *The Golden Door* exhibition creates in the Silvermine Galleries a focus and place of meaning that is once again evidence that the personal is both political and universal.

Personal stories of immigration, social activism, the legacy of oppression, and the longing for justice are all part of the works on view. Some images reflect the sad legacies of the American history of forced migrations, limits to immigration, slavery, laws that created barriers to entry, and walls that continue to be built. Yet, there are also expressions of hope; connections to the history of art; the power of joining together at places of worship and in the memory of a dinner party; freedom from the oppression of a country of birth; empowerment in higher education, professional work opportunities, and immigrant advocacy groups; the rituals of celebration and loss that bind people to one another.

The artists in *The Golden Door* address issues and histories—directly or in an oblique manner—that face all of us: the self and the other; the immigrant experience; the welcome or rejection of people from around the globe who have traveled to the United States freely or under duress, as students or with family, some still believing in the ideals presented in “The New Colossus.” The artist is the protagonist of our story, crafting their own light—not held high over their head in monumental fashion like that of Lady Liberty but rather finding in their art a way to communicate complex histories—of individuals, families, communities, and nations. *The Golden Door* is a wide and generous avenue into one of the most critical dialogues of our time.

EXHIBITING ARTISTS



Lois Bielefeld and Nirmal Raja

In response to increasing racial polarity in the United States, Nirmal Raja and Lois Bielefeld launched a collaborative project exploring identity, place, and belonging. *Reaching through 5 yards, 8497 miles*, a series of 70 photographs, references the amount of fabric in a traditional, Indian sari and the number of miles between Raja's birthplace in India and her current home in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Begun in the first year of the Trump presidency, the project was a direct response to the artists' rising fears regarding xenophobia and danger not only to immigrants but also to the queer community of which Bielefeld is a part. In choosing to work together Raja and Bielefeld reached across racial lines to examine Milwaukee as "place" and to interrogate what it means to be American, to "belong" in the framework of an equitable society.

Bielefeld is an American photographer who was born and raised in Milwaukee. She has focused her practice on documenting the culture of the American Midwest, especially family units. “I am still grappling with my whiteness and understanding my blind spots, implicit biases, and continual need to grow/emerge and be part of the potential in this moment to create an equitable society for all. Honestly, if Nirmal hadn’t approached me and extended her hand and invitation to collaborate and share in this journey, I don’t think it would have been my place to make this work, which focuses on migration and visual understanding of race and ultimately belonging.”³

Raja is a South Asian American interdisciplinary sculptor and conceptual artist whose art has long focused on memory and the perception of time. “Initially, I struggled to find a visual language that spoke to a Western audience. After all, that is where I live. When I introduced Indian elements, it was hard to escape the trap of reobjectifying the exotic East. It is a challenge for anyone who grew up elsewhere to navigate and find an authentic voice while avoiding the pitfalls of the exotic on one hand and yet being able to communicate to an audience with a different history and vantage point on the other. I do not have to choose one or the other. Appeasement toward a particular audience can lead to pretense and can ring hollow. My history in India and my thirty years of life in the United States are both part of me.”

A central question of their collaboration—the first time they worked together—was whether the images in the series would be completely constructed scenes or spontaneously captured performances. The artists went with the latter, melding the traditions of performance art and street theater, Western and Indian traditions of the artist in the public arena. “There are multiple histories and forms of performance in India, but each is linked to the long tradition of storytelling in public theatre. The earliest form of classical theatre in India was Sanskrit theatre, which flourished between the first and tenth centuries; ... Though gathered for entertainment, the audience was also consciously or subconsciously absorbing socially appropriate narratives and values that might then be incorporated into their own daily performances as socialized and gendered individuals.”⁴

In each setting in *Reaching through 5 yards, 8497 miles*, Raja wears one of her collection of more than 150 saris. In order to counteract the trope of the entertainment value of the exotic, the photographs harness the visual differences that separate or allay cultures to allow Raja to assert an “authentic self.” Saris are everyday garments in India but they can also take on ritual significance. The bright fuchsia sari in *Milwaukee Women’s March – Sari 40* (2018) was given to Raja as a gift on the occasion of her cousin’s marriage. Raja shared, “I thought I would never wear it, as it is such a bright and unnatural color in cold and grey Wisconsin. But it was a perfect color to use for the Women’s March.”

Downtown – Sari 18 (2017) was taken in downtown Milwaukee just after Labor Day weekend, with American flags still on display. A young pom pom squad, walking in the opposite direction from Raja, was serendipitous, but is evidence of Bielefeld's responsiveness to a real-time scenario and her innate understanding of how body language signals relationship status and power. *Sikh Temple of Wisconsin Sari 55* (2018) is a nuanced record of the tragic legacy of violence toward immigrants. On August 5, 2012, a white supremacist entered this place of worship and community and opened fire, killing six people and injuring several others. Two bullet holes on a door in the temple have been preserved as a memory of this hate crime.



***Milwaukee Women's March – Sari 40* 2018**

From the series *Reaching through 5 yards, 8497 miles*

color photograph (archival pigment print)

44 x 60 inches, edition of 5

\$2500.

Courtesy of Portrait Society Gallery, Milwaukee, WI



Downtown – Sari 18 2017

From the series Reaching through 5 yards, 8497 miles

color photograph (archival pigment print)

44 x 60 inches, edition of 5

\$2500.

Courtesy of Portrait Society Gallery, Milwaukee, WI



Milwaukee Women's March – Sari 40 2018

From the series Reaching through 5 yards, 8497 miles

color photograph (archival pigment print)

44 x 60 inches, edition of 5

\$2500.

Courtesy of Portrait Society Gallery, Milwaukee, WI



Eric Chiang

Eric Chiang is a contemporary Taiwanese American painter. His large-scale, multi-canvas paintings are inspired both by traditional Chinese landscapes and European classical music. Chiang utilizes expressive gesture to present rugged, atmospheric spaces in which the powerful energy of the natural world is keenly felt. *Ode to Earth I–VI* (2018) was directly inspired by Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 1, movement 4. Stirred by the power of the musical composition, Chiang created this ambitious six-canvas painting. The dark palette, expressive gesture, and jagged forms in a hostile environment create the sense that we are witnessing a great storm in progress. Chiang's practice can be understood in relation to the history of landscape paintings in China (dating to the Tang dynasty) with the shared emphasis on calligraphic gestures, mountains and rivers as subject, and the relationship between the spirit of the artist and the work of art.

“In September 1981 (at the age of 23), leaving my parents in Taiwan, I flew to New York. I remember that while the airplane was about to land in JFK, I was exhaustively searching for the Statue of Liberty.” Chiang earned an MBA and for two decades worked in the finance sector in New York City. Following a life-long dream to be a practicing artist, Chiang quit his corporate job in 2007. For the first four years, he was isolated and searching for a community of artists. The artist says, “I have been so grateful for all I have received in the U.S.—the openness, the opportunities, the friendship! Today, I am proud to be an American with Taiwanese cultural background. I have a strong passion to expand my artistic experience to help my fellow artists, especially those who somewhat follow a similar path of mine, both from career development and from an immigrant’s point of view.”



Ode to Earth I–VI 2018

oil on canvas

72 x 108 inches

\$10,000.

Courtesy of the Artist



Susan Clinard

Susan Clinard is an American sculptor. Her nearly lifesize figurative sculptures combine wooden hand-carved torsos with fired ceramic heads and hands. The human figures in *History Repeats Itself* (2017) represent a historical cross section of refugee immigrants who have been banned from entry into the United States, and include a Muslim woman and infant, a Japanese American interned during World War II; a man whose yellow star recalls quotas denying entry to European Jews fleeing the Holocaust; and an African man and young girl who reflect the American history of slavery as well as immigration acts targeting Africans.

Clinard carves these powerful figures from yellow pine structural beams reclaimed from a building in New Haven. Some bodies are left rough-hewn while others are smoothly sanded. She sculpts the

faces and hands of the figures from clay that she fires. As realistic as the figures may seem, the artist does not use photographic sources. All of the faces were created from her imagination. Reflecting the title's suggestion that little will change, an anonymous male, the least refined of the group with details that would suggest an identity still to be carved, is placed as the lead figure.

While born and raised in the United States, Clinard has deep and longstanding connections to immigrant communities. For the past 13 years, she has worked closely with Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services in New Haven. "I never thought about my connection to immigrants and the refugee community as being anything other than part of my life ... an everyday part of my life. And having met, loved, and cherished so many in this community, my life is forever richer and I have learned so much about what it means to be human."



History Repeats Itself 2017

wood, ceramic, acrylic

108 x 84 x 30 inches

\$35,000.

Courtesy of the Artist



Mohamad Hafez

Mohamad Hafez is a Syrian American sculptor and architect. His sculptures reference the devastation of war alongside the indomitable power of the human spirit. Now an architect in New Haven, Hafez was born in Damascus and raised in Saudi Arabia. The mirror form in *Damascene Athan Series #3* (2013) was inspired by Hafez's last visit to Damascus in 2011, on the eve of the Syrian War. "I integrated those final few moments of peace into the decorative mirror frames which remind me of the plush Victorian interiors we had to leave behind."⁵

Feeling homesick, and unable to visit Syria due to travel restrictions, Hafez created the *Baggage* series—miniature architectural streetscapes of war-torn Damascus contained in empty, battered suitcases. *Baggage #3* (2016–17) and *Baggage #7* (2020) are part of an ongoing series, presenting the almost unfathomable

idea of needing to pack all of one's earthly belongings into a single suitcase. When I asked Hafez if this is the sad legacy of forced immigration he said, "Absolutely. But, we all know you can't do that. It's more of the emotional baggage that one usually sticks in that suitcase."⁶

Hafez often integrates the language of the Qur'an in his sculptures. The text on the face of the "mirror" is a quote from the Qur'an—"O, generous one!"—a phrase commonly invoked when people are in despair. In *Baggage #3* a small girl is presented in painted silhouette standing atop a pedestal that is real. Here Hafez offers a riff on the British street artist Banksy (b. 1974) whose anonymous graffiti champions social justice. He is also honoring the start of the Syrian revolution which began, according to the artist, "with kids writing on a wall." The girl is tagging a prayer from the Qur'an which translates into English as, "And your Lord said, Call upon me and I will answer your prayer."



Damascene Athan Series #3 2013
mixed media, plaster, pigment, found objects
34 x 24 x 8 inches
NFS
Courtesy of the Artist



Baggage # 3 2016-17
plaster, paint, antique suitcase, found objects, rusted metal, wood,
Persian carpet, dried plants
24 x 12 x 8 inches
\$12,000.
Courtesy of the Artist



Baggage # 3 2016-17

plaster, paint, antique suitcase, found objects, rusted metal, wood,

Persian carpet, dried plants

24 x 12 x 8 inches

\$12,000.

Courtesy of the Artist



Ana Maria Hernando

Ana Maria Hernando is an Argentinian American visual artist who makes paintings, drawings and prints with a layering of natural and formal elements. Premiering at Silvermine are six assemblage sculptures—all made in 2017—that were envisioned by Hernando to be gently moved by the visitor during the course of an exhibition. Given the COVID crisis, this is not possible, but the sense that a sculpture (or a person) is different in every setting connects strongly to her experience as an immigrant from Argentina.

Each assemblage—which the artist collectively calls *The Napkin Project*—began with an embroidered cotton napkin given to guests as they left a dinner at Hernando's home. Each guest was invited to be inspired by the object, to change it (or not), and then return it to the artist. The title of each assemblage is the name of the guest. The napkins sat in the artist's studio in Boulder, Colorado,

for nearly a year. She began to combine them with objects and paintings that were sitting in the studio. She chose elements that reflected her relationship with the person. They became to the artist “slices of a portrait,” as she never attempted to do a realistic or comprehensive portrait of the subject. Each finished assemblage was carefully organized in a box, a beautiful object on its own, that could travel and become a new version of itself at every location. Connecting to the experience of immigration and migration, we can understand that Hernando has created objects representing the spirit of individuals who are able to find new life in each place they live.

The Napkin Project connects in vital ways to Hernando’s experience as an immigrant. “One big realization, as soon as I was in the States, was that I became immediately invisible. If I was there (here, I should say) or not didn’t really matter to the people of this new country. Apart from my new husband, nobody knew me. Who I was in Argentina had instantly disappeared. The theme of invisibility has stayed strongly in my work. In *The Napkin Project*, I want to empower the other, in a way that is light and loving. I want to empower, too, the small gestures. *The Napkin Project* is, in its core, a small and quiet gesture; like women in a circle embroidering.”



Barbara 2017

plaster, paint, antique suitcase, found objects, rusted metal, wood,
embroidered fabric, velvet, felted paper, watercolor on paper, resin,
paint on tin, cotton, giclée on wood, napkin, wallpaper, pins

52 x 86 x 1.5 inches

POR

Courtesy of the artist and Robischon Gallery, Denver, CO



Bud 2017
 felted paper, printmaking inks on paper, paint on tin, cotton,
 giclée on wood, napkin, pins
 47 x 27 x 1.5 inches
 POR
 Courtesy of the artist and Robischon Gallery, Denver, CO



David 2017
 velvet, paint on paper, resin, paint on tin, giclée on wood, linen,
 cotton, wallpaper, pins
 50 x 29 x 1.5 inches
 POR
 Courtesy of the artist and Robischon Gallery, Denver, CO



Laura 2017
 paper, paint, giclée on wood, resin, paint on wood,
 napkin with inks, wallpaper, pins, tape
 49 x 21 x 1.5 inches
 \$5,000.
 Courtesy of the artist and Robischon Gallery, Denver, CO



Verbs of Sorrow 2017

velvet, paint on paper, felted paper, giclée on wood,
napkin, wool, wallpaper, pins
79 x 45 x 21 inches
\$6,000.

Courtesy of the artist and Robischon Gallery, Denver, CO



***Walt and Maybe Sheila* 2017**

embroidered fabric, velvet, felted paper, cotton, giclée on wood,
napkin, wallpaper, pins, plastic sponge, dried flowers, fabric, vellum,
acrylics on hard book cover

51 x 25 x 2 inches

POR

Courtesy of the artist and Robischon Gallery, Denver, CO



Shantell Martin

Shantell Martin is a British visual artist, internationally known for her deceptively simple ink drawings. Working across traditional platforms, she melds philosophy, design, performance, architecture, and fine art. *Future Seen* (2020) is a large-scale ink-on-canvas drawing that showcases Martin's improvisational style—playful and animated, irreverent and questioning. Its dynamic energy is present in a series of sweeping arcs, the mere suggestion of faces, and stick figures teetering on the edge of the unknown. The central theme seems to be finding of one's balance, one's bearings, one's place. All "subjects" are presented as the merest suggestion of themselves, generously open to the gaze and interpretation of the viewer. The long neck of a duck is punctuated with a broken line that suggests the separation of lanes along a highway. The Earth is personified as a gentle figure who gazes in two directions, like the Janus of Roman myth, both toward the title language "future" and in another direction (as the "face" of a mountain takes on double

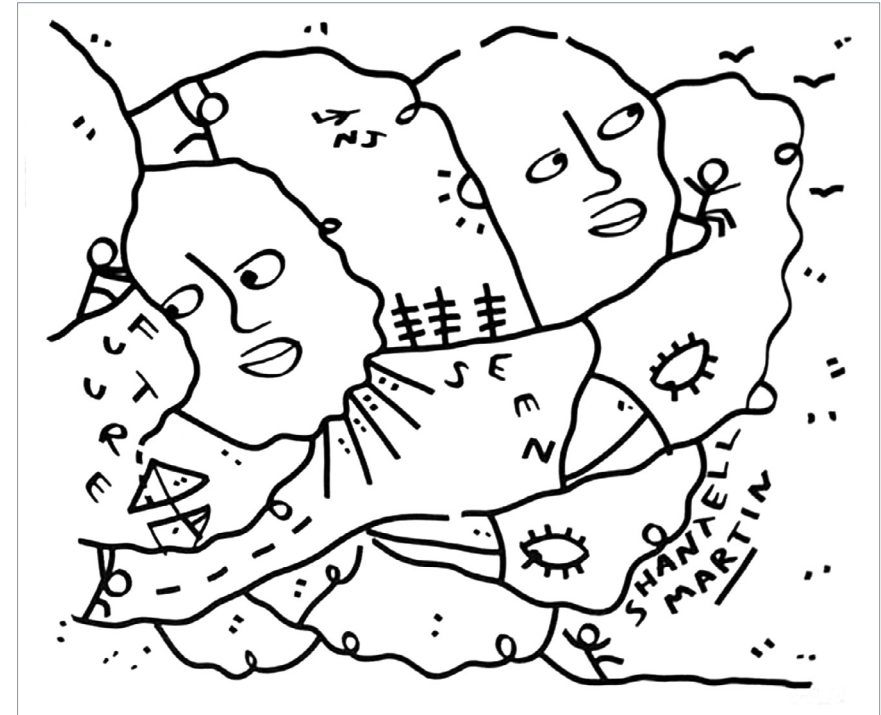
meaning) toward birds scattered along the very edge of the drawing. Like the tiny human stick figures—one who seems to be holding up the “future” on its shoulders—we are also allowed the joy of sitting on the edge of the Earth and welcoming the next sunrise.

As a child growing up in London, Martin always considered herself an outsider: “half-Nigerian, brown, with an Afro.” In a TED2020 talk, she speaks directly to the viewer in an approachable style that is also reflected in the upbeat energy of her drawings. “How do you find your way out of a dark, racist, homophobic, and very lonely place? This is where the pen comes in. I started to draw. I followed this line and drew myself out of a culture that was only telling me what I couldn’t do. Because, whether you choose to believe it or not, England is still a country that is rooted and functions within the class system. As a young, black, gay female artist from a working-class family, I didn’t stand a chance.”⁷

After living in Japan for several years as a young adult, Martin made a permanent move to the United States in 2009. “I moved to New York. That’s what you do as an artist, right? You move to the greatest city in the world that has the ability to make you feel completely and utterly invisible. This is when I began to ask myself,

‘Who are you?’ I followed the line. I let it lead the way. I’ve let my lines become very much like a language, a language that has unfolded much like life.”⁸

Connecting to the sentiment expressed in the poem by Emma Lazarus, Martin shared, “This is an incredibly beautiful piece and I hope that America can return very soon to being a Land for the ‘huddled masses yearning to breathe free.’”



Future Seen 2020

ink on canvas

60 x 72 inches

\$9,000.

Courtesy of the Artist



Debra Priestly

Debra Priestly is an American painter and sculptor. Throughout her practice, she is prompted by ancestry and memory to pay tribute to family members who lived in pre-Civil War African American communities. The *mattoon* paintings, three of which are featured in *The Golden Door* are a continuation of Priestly's *Preserved* series in which family history and lore—from historical photographic portraits to hand-sketched maps—seem to be encased in canning jars. Through a masterful use of gouache and acrylic paint—at times thinned to near invisibility—Priestly creates an atmospheric space in which more assertive graphite gestures and line take on a sculptural weight. The motif of glass canning jars allows the space of the painting to be as much about light and energy as it is about object and form. In these jars, handwritten records, historical papers, and photographs document the lives of her ancestors, creating a system that, the artist concludes, “may only make sense to me and my family.”

The *mattoon* series is titled after Mattoon, Illinois, where the artist visited her family elders; *mattoon 5* (2002) is a memory map, a genealogical record of the history of Priestly's maternal and paternal strands. The use of photographic transfer gives *mattoon 5* the weight of a historical document and the soft edges of memory.

mattoon 15 (2014) highlights the pattern of a filet lace heirloom tablecloth framed by neat rows of canning jar silhouettes. This handmade treasure was the artist's mother's wedding tablecloth and in subsequent years, it was placed upon the dining room table for special occasions such as Sunday dinners, major holidays, and family reunions.

For Priestly, "the focus of this work is not on enslavement, it is more on migration and, in most cases, how one gets from one place to another." Some of the drawings encased in jars in *mattoon 16* (2014) are her mother's maps which the family actually used for travel. Others make reference to the migration of some of Priestly's ancestors. For Priestly, "the canning jar is an infinitely versatile prism where narratives unfold."



mattoon 5 2002
acrylic, photo transfer, ink, resin on wood
80 x 24 inches
POR
Courtesy of the Artist



mattoon 15 2014

ink, acrylic, graphite, absorbent ground on birch

36 x 36 x 2 inches

POR

Courtesy of the artist and June Kelly Gallery, New York, NY



mattoon 16 2014

ink, acrylic, graphite, absorbent ground on birch

36 x 36 x 2 inches

POR

Courtesy of the artist and June Kelly Gallery, New York, NY



Rick Shaefer

Rick Shaefer is an American visual artist best known for his large-scale drawings. A photographer, painter, and draughtsman, Shaefer has created ambitious landscapes with a Northern European iconography. His most recent work, of which *The New Colossus* (2018–19) is a part, is a series of lifesize charcoal drawings that build on the legacy of history paintings. The monumental drawing on view in *The Golden Door* responds to debates over a wall across the southern border of the United States. The title *The New Colossus* recalls Emma Lazarus's poem on the Statue of Liberty welcoming newcomers. In Shaefer's drawing, the poet looks out at us from among other historical figures, including the maestro of American entertainment Walt Disney, reviewing site plans.

Shaefer was born in the United States, but lived in many places across Europe as the child of an Army officer. His (re)interpretation of history reflects a complex and shifting role of the artist in the charged political arena of responses to the history of immigration to America and the promises made and broken. He sees *The New Colossus* as “an ironic take on a 19th-century promise of a welcome to all” who came to America. “We are now contemplating, and indeed in the process of constructing, a massive barrier to such inclusion and welcoming. We are going back on the promise that Emma’s sonnet eloquently expounds and that the statue itself was meant to embody.”

The New Colossus—10 feet high and 15 feet wide—was drawn with charcoal on prepared acetate. But because there is no glass between the viewer and the acetate which is grommeted to the gallery wall, Shaefer has created an experience of surprising intimacy, as if the viewer is part of the still-unfolding drama. Visual clues connect the tableaux to art, theater, architecture, and cultural history from the 16th to the 21st century. The black and white palette emphasizes the tropes of etchings of historically significant events from the 18th and 19th centuries, which in *The New Colossus* include text at the bottom, a crest in the middle, and drawn curtains and angels to convey the importance of the scene.

Shaefer encourages viewers to immerse themselves in the shifting narrative without suggesting the end of the story. “I really try to avoid being a teacher or a preacher, or even an activist,” he shared. “I think my role as an artist is just to put down, as honestly as possible, my personal responses to the world I live in. If I lay out some thoughts on paper that I have been confronting or engaging with, what happens next, how viewers respond, is really out of my control. But, that said, of course I have put down a certain agenda and would like it to be part of the larger discussion if possible.”



The New Colossus 2018-19

charcoal on prepared acetate

116 x 180 inches

NFS

Courtesy of the artist



Sofie Swann

Sofie Swann is an Iranian American painter whose large-scale paintings are filled edge to edge with small, repeated motifs organized around a grid, connecting them to two art movements that took hold in the 1970s: Minimalism and Pattern and Decoration (P&D). "Indeed, for many of the Pattern and Decoration artists of the 1970s, pattern first emerged from the painterly mark and from the texture of raw materials as a self-conscious extension and variation upon the Minimalist grid."⁹

Flight to Nowhere (2016) connects this history of art with the dramatic biography of the artist. At the age of 14, she "was on the last plane out before the revolutionary government shut down the airport in Tehran. The words of Emma Lazarus poignantly capture the experience of many immigrants, particularly for those, like me, who left their homeland in distress. America represents hope." For Swann, the choice of blue in *Flight to Nowhere* is an energizing,

upbeat element in a painting that relates directly to the day she left Iran as a teenager. Her use of “Persian tea” as a medium is, according to the artist, “largely symbolic. It is my way of holding on to my roots. While many Iranian artist portray their culture more directly with Persian calligraphy, miniatures and historic symbols, I intentionally choose a less literal approach to embrace my blended and evolving identity.” A number of the representational elements in *Flight to Nowhere* are meant to be airplanes, but as our gaze follows the patterns, the negative space suggests a maze and a preview of the immigrant experience as one of finding one’s way in a country as yet personally uncharted.

Swann’s painting *American Dream* (2016) features the vernacular shape of a peaked triangle resting atop a rectangular block, instantly recognizable as a house, a home, a shelter. The deep orange used in a series of small, staccato images that move our gaze across the surface of the painting connects “to newfound freedom, a renewed sense of stability, foundation, and home.” In counterpoint, the raw umber marks, which the artist calls “stains,” connect to the imperfections in the American Dream. The perimeter outlines—walls or imposed boundaries—around each house suggest an oppressive conformity and a sense of loss felt in the immigrant experience. The one empty square in the middle of the painting says “vide” or “empty” in French. “There is one part of me that will always remain void,” Swann shared, “because I lost something tremendous that I still remember vividly. Many immigrants can relate to this feeling.”



Flight to Nowhere 2016
acrylic and Persian tea on canvas
48 x 60 inches
\$12,000.
Courtesy of the artist



American Dream 2016

acrylic on canvas

48 x 60 inches

\$12,000.

Courtesy of the artist



Taro Takizawa

Taro Takizawa is a Japanese printmaker who merges the old and the new—the East and the West—in subject matter, techniques, and intentions. For *The Golden Door* exhibition, Takizawa created *Reassembling Memories* (2020) a dynamic, large-scale installation that responds directly to the particular architecture of the Borglum Gallery, tucked within the Silvermine Arts Center. He adhered sheets of black vinyl to an alcove-like space in the gallery, covering the walls floor to ceiling, edge to edge. He then cut the vinyl away by hand then to reveal the wall beneath. A large, centrally placed circle is at geometric counterpoint with the more wave-like patterns on staggered wall, visually collapsing the space.

Powerful wave patterns, a strong sense of movement, and a skewed perspective connect Takizawa's art to that of the Japanese woodblock printmaker Hokusai (1760–1849). "The feeling for the arabesque in place of volume, for pictorial surface per se in place of illusionistic depth, for intrinsic value of point and line ... the European avant-garde realized that all these things which had been agitating them so greatly were already present as a mature art form in the Japanese prints that had been arriving in Europe, and especially in Paris, since the 1860s."¹⁰ Takizawa deliberately connects with Japanese aesthetics—"our unbroken traditions are important in this rapidly changing present century." His methods, he says, "are based on an American contemporary perspective of research and experimentation which leads to discoveries." His use of powerful positive and negative space recalls the Op Art experience of a Bridget Riley painting or the movement of a shimmering LED billboard in Times Square.

Takizawa came to the United States at the age of 18 for advanced studies. Being an immigrant profoundly impacted the imagery of his art. "I started using these 'iconic' or traditional images during my undergrad. Since I was asked about my upbringing quite often from curious peers, I started making images that were somewhat expected from a Japanese artist, but I tried to do it in an authentic way. I consider myself doing both, building on tradition and also challenging it."

Koi Pond (2020), installed on the floors of the gallery, uses traditional Japanese imagery of carp, but Takizawa's interpretation gives it a decidedly contemporary spin. Utilizing vinyl relief prints, the artist creates a colorful, animated space that the visitor must walk across to enter and leave the gallery. The koi are counterposed with chrysanthemum blossoms, both images with long histories as decorative elements in Japanese fine art, décor, and garden design. "Koi" in Japanese means love, affection or friendship, a fitting reflection of the generous spirit present in both of Takizawa's installations.



Reassembling Memories 2020

vinyl wall installation, site-specific

88 x 250 inches

POR

Courtesy of the artist



Koi Pond 2020
site-specific floor installation, vinyl relief print
108 x 102 inches
POR
Courtesy of the artist

1. Emma Lazarus biographical entry, <https://poets.org/poet/emma-lazarus>, accessed September 27, 2020.
2. John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860–1925*, reprint edition (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1963; Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 23–24.
3. Direct quotations from all artists are from email exchanges with the author, September 16–November 3, 2020, except as noted.
4. Diana Freundl, “Performing Queer Realities,” in *Moving Still: Performative Photography in India* (exh. cat.), (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2019), 114.
5. Mohamad Hafez permanent collection entry, writing about the *Damascene Athan Series* on his website, <http://www.mohamadhafez.com/Damascene-Athan-Series>, accessed November 10, 2020.
6. Hafez, telephone conversation with the author, October 6, 2020.
7. Shantell Martin, “How Drawing Can Set You Free,” TED2020, www.ted.com/talks/shantell_martin_how_drawing_can_set_you_free?language=e, accessed October 7, 2020.
8. Ibid.
9. Norma Broude, “The Pattern and Decoration Movement,” in *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrant (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 216–17.
10. Thomas Zacharias, “Cherry-Wood-Blossom,” in *Japanese Prints*, ed. Gabriele Fahr-Becker (Cologne: Taschen, 2001), 30

Exhibition essay editor: Michelle Bolton King

ARTIST VIDEO PRODUCER



Michelle Y. Loh, is a New York based art advisor, gallery director, and curator. Loh established Boers-Li Gallery's New York space and serves on the Board of Directors of the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts, New York, NY.

Video interviews with the Golden Door artists are available on the Silvermine Galleries YouTube channel. The interviews provide individual perspective on the artists and their work—uncovering personal stories and illuminating the ways in which the artists' experience of immigration or migration informs their art.

FUNDING

cThumanities

Connecticut Humanities brings together people of different viewpoints, ages and backgrounds to learn from and about each other, discuss issues of vital concern, explore new ideas and historical perspectives and experience the cultural richness around them.

Silvermine Galleries

Silvermine Galleries represents the Silvermine Guild of Artists. Our Galleries have exhibited art luminaries including Joseph Albers, Gabor Peterdi, Milton Avery, Elaine deKooning, Clement Greenberg, Alice Neel, Louise Nevelson, Larry Rivers, Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Faith Ringold, James Rosenquist, Chuck Close, Philip Johnson, and many others.

The Galleries continue to expand on our heritage through compelling exhibitions of art by emerging and internationally recognized artists. A distinguished list of curators have juried many of our landmark exhibitions, among them are Dore Ashton, Milton Avery, Bill Carroll, Tom Eccles, Andre Emmerich, Jennifer Farrell, Henry Geldzahler, Patricia Hickson, Hilton Kramer, Beth McLaughlin, Barbara O'Brien, David Ross, Holly Solomon, Allan Stone, Ann Temkin, and Marcia Tucker.

Our exhibitions are accompanied by programming that encourages appreciation of art and its role in society. Our layered approach is tailored to make our exhibitions meaningful, accessible, and enjoyable for diverse audiences of every age and background and always offer opportunities for visitors to connect with art, and each other through an exploration of ideas.

Silvermine Guild of Artists

Silvermine has been a place for artists to gather since 1906 when visionary sculptor Solon Borglum moved to the area and held annual exhibitions in his studio. He created weekly artist-critiques called the Knockers Club. Formed in 1922, The Silvermine Guild of Artists was incorporated in 1924 as a not-for-profit to provide a permanent and supportive community of artists. Guild members represent artists that have a high level of accomplishment and are selected through a jurying process.

Silvermine Guild of Artists has been a hub for some of the most talented artists in the Northeast. Guild membership has grown to almost 300 artist members nationwide, and has included such renowned artists as Abe Ajay, James Daugherty, Carlus Dyer, James Flora, James Grashow, Robert Kaupelis, Alice Neel, Gabor Peterdi, Charles Reiffel, James Rosenquist and honorary member Faith Ringgold.

Since its inception, guild membership has been a selective peer jurying process. As a result, the guild has held its membership to high standards with many members having work represented in permanent collections of some of the world's most prestigious museums, as well as prominent private and corporate collections.

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