

# Culture

## arts & entertainment

The Washington Diplomat | July 2019

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### DIPLOMATIC SPOUSES

## Power of Touch

Changu Mazana, wife of the Botswana ambassador and a mother of four, is studying massage therapy as part of her “passion is to use my energy to help other people.” **PAGE 31**



### ART

## Palate for Protest



Artist Rirkrit Tiravanija grew up in a diplomatic family — and with that morsel of insight, his thrilling exhibition combining food and protest at the Hirshhorn takes on an even deeper layer of meaning. **PAGE 33**

### EXHIBITS

## Urban Ingenuity

When it comes to designing the city of the future, it's little surprise to find the Swedes in the lead. The nation that revolutionized modern home furnishing has set its sights on the urban landscapes of 2019 and beyond. **PAGE 34**



Edward Keinholz's  
“The Non-War Memorial”

PHOTO: © KIENHOLZ / COURTESY OF L.A. LOUVER, VENICE, CA / PHOTO BY SHELDAN C. COLLINS

## NEW LOOK AT VIETNAM

In the annals of U.S. warfare, Vietnam was a failure on so many levels that it's difficult to keep track of the blunders that have become the subject of countless articles, books and documentaries. While street protests and anti-war marches have been thoroughly documented, the role of artists in opposing the war are less well-known, but a captivating exhibition examines their work in “Artists Respond: American Art and the Vietnam War, 1965–1975.” **PAGE 30**

# Vietnam Re-Examined

First-of-Its-Kind Exhibit Looks at Vietnam War Through Lens of American Artists • BY BRENDAN L. SMITH

## Artists Respond: American Art and the Vietnam War, 1965–1975

THROUGH AUG. 18

SMITHSONIAN AMERICAN ART MUSEUM

8TH AND F STREETS, NW

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In the annals of U.S. warfare, Vietnam was a failure on so many levels that it's difficult to keep track of the blunders that have become the subject of countless articles, books and documentaries. Political and military leaders repeatedly lied to the American public about the war and sought to suppress unsparing accounts such as the Pentagon Papers.

While street protests and anti-war marches have been thoroughly documented, the role of artists in opposing the war are less well-known. A captivating exhibition at the Smithsonian American Art Museum examines their work in "Artists Respond: American Art and the Vietnam War, 1965–1975." Unprecedented in historical scale and depth, the exhibition features both famous and rarely discussed works and showcases previously marginalized artistic voices such as women, African Americans, Latinos and Asian Americans.

The exhibition includes almost 100 works by 58 artists who examined the devastating effects of the war through a diverse range of mediums and styles. Organized by the museum's curator of 20th-century art, Melissa Ho, the exhibition features work spanning a tumultuous decade from President Lyndon B. Johnson's regrettable decision to deploy U.S. ground troops to South Vietnam in 1965 to the fall of Saigon 10 years later when U.S. forces abandoned many South Vietnamese allies.

The work runs the gamut from subtle, such as Dan Flavin's conceptual crisscrossing red neon tubes, to the sensational. The most extreme example is Chris Burden's 1971 performance piece titled "Shoot," where a marksman shoots him in the left arm with a rifle. The performance rings hollow like a publicity stunt rather than a serious examination of the deadly consequences of war. American soldiers dying in the jungles of Vietnam wouldn't be impressed by a privileged white artist safe at home deciding when and where he will be shot in scripted, sanitized violence.

Yoko Ono's pioneering performance titled "Cut Piece" is more poignant and powerful but may only be tangentially related to the Vietnam War. The performance in 1964, two years before she met John Lennon and became famous for war protests, shows her silently sitting on the floor at Carnegie Hall while white men and women step forward and cut off parts of her clothes that they then keep. Some seem tentative, making small snips, while a smirking man cuts a swath through the top of her dress and bra straps, causing Ono to flinch and cover herself. The implied violence against women digs deeper and questions our unspoken complicity in that degradation.

Vietnam was the first war that was beamed into living rooms across America through extensive TV coverage and newspaper articles and photographs. A war



PHOTO: BY ALFRED LUTJEANS / LICENSED BY THE CHRIS BURDEN ESTATE AND ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NY

Chris Burden had a marksman shoot him in the arm for his 1971 performance piece "Shoot."



PHOTO: © MARTHA ROSLER, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND MITCHELL-INNES & NASH, NY



PHOTO: COURTESY OF YOKO ONO LENNON / © YOKO ONO 1965/2019

A film shows Yoko Ono's "Cut Piece" being performed at Carnegie Hall in New York in 1965.

that had seemed distant suddenly came home in vivid color news reels of dying soldiers and napalmed jungles. Martha Rosler's photomontage "Red Stripe Kitchen" from her "House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home" series flips that dynamic on its head, showing American soldiers inspecting a modern American kitchen. The work conveys a fundamental disconnect. Americans would be outraged if soldiers invaded their homes, but they were funding those same soldiers who were burning Vietnamese villages and committing atrocities such as the massacre at My Lai.



PHOTO: © 2018 STEPHEN FLAVIN / ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NW / PHOTO COURTESY DAVID ZWIRNER

A survey of artistic reactions to the Vietnam War at the Smithsonian American Art Museum includes pieces such as Dan Flavin's "monument 4 for those who have been killed in ambush (to P.K. who reminded me about death)," above; Martha Rosler's "Red Stripe Kitchen," at left; and David Hammons's "America the Beautiful," below.



PHOTO: © DAVID HAMMONS / COURTESY THE OAKLAND MUSEUM OF CALIFORNIA

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## Spouses

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ships mean, what love means.”

A majority-black country of just over 2 million people, Botswana has long enjoyed a reputation for racial equality, democracy, progressive social policies, good governance and a strong economy, all of which has made it one of most stable nations in Africa since the former British protectorate gained its independence in 1966.

Botswana is slightly larger than France and slightly smaller than Texas. This sparsely populated, landlocked country in Southern Africa is known for some of the most stunning wilderness and wildlife on the African continent. In fact, 70 percent of the land is occupied by the Kalahari Desert and 38 percent is comprised of national parks, reserves and wildlife management areas.

Although mining drives the economy (Botswana is home to the world's largest diamond mine), tourism has become an increasingly important source of revenue as visitors flock to its nature preserves.

While Botswana has been widely praised for its conservation efforts, it recently attracted controversy because it ended a five-year ban on elephant hunting. The government faced intense international pressure to keep the ban to protect the 27,000 elephants in the country. There are only 450,000 elephants left in Africa — one-third of which have found refuge in Botswana — and poachers kill around 30,000 each year. Critics also say the decision was motivated by Botswanan President Mokgweetsi Masisi's efforts to woo rural voters ahead of elections later this year.

But the government defended the decision, arguing that Botswana's tough ban on hunting had led to unsustainable levels of elephant population growth and was hurting local communities. In addition, the government said the ban had actually decreased revenues that go toward conservation efforts because limited trophy hunting can bring in significant income.

“By sacrificing 700 elephants per year we're likely going to save more,” Erik Verreynne, a wildlife veterinarian and consultant based in Gaborone, told Kimon de Greef and Me-



When Changu Mazana and her husband, Botswanan Ambassador David Newman, moved to D.C. in 2015, their four children ranged in age from 9 to 17 and all attended Bullis School in Potomac, Md.

gan Spica of *The New York Times* in May.

Despite the contentious elephant ban, Botswana has broken the mold with its progressive policies in other areas. In June, the country's High Court rejected a 54-year-old colonial law that could imprison people in same-sex relationships. The landmark ruling stood in stark contrast to other African nations such as Kenya that still criminalize homosexuality.

Mazana says that because of its unique history and smart governance, she has high hopes for the future of her country.

“I have no doubt in my mind that Botswana will soon be the pride of Africa in every industry. To have such a dynamic leader [President Mokgweetsi Masisi] with a clear vision for his country and a first lady so supportive and in the forefront of women's development, the future ahead looks great for Botswana,” she said. “These dynamic visionaries are looking for growth and change. They are open-minded and welcoming.... We are excited. Change is good.”

That applies to attitudes about interracial relationships, which have evolved significantly in recent decades, particularly in the United States. Despite the progress, racial tensions continue to percolate throughout the U.S., as evidenced by

the Black Lives Matter movement.

“Being a biracial couple in Washington is easier than some other American cities. When we travel, it's not a problem in New York or Miami. I haven't been to other places, like the Midwest, where it might be uncomfortable. There is no problem in U.K. or Europe. It is not an issue,”

Mazana observed.

“When I am the only black person in the room, I just get on with it in a positive way. I am a confident person and I think that helps,” she added.

On the flip side, at monthly African Ambassadors' Group meetings, Newman is the only white envoy

from a sub-Saharan country.

When they first arrived in 2015, their four children ranged in age from 9 to 17. The couple sent them to nearby Bullis School in Potomac, Md., which serves students from kindergarten to the 12th grade, so that they could all go to the same school regardless of age. Now their eldest, Pearl, is 20 and will be starting her junior year this fall at the George Washington University, where she will be studying international business. She lives just off campus and often brings her college friends home during the holidays.

She has another advantage for choosing GWU. Since the Botswana Embassy is not far from campus, she often has lunch with her father. Their younger daughter, Baraedi, is 17 and a senior. She plays basketball and soccer at Bullis and also runs and works out in their home gym. Their two sons, Khumo, 14, and Jack, 12, love cycling and soccer.

As the wife of a first-time ambassador, Mazana said the experience has been an eye-opening, pleasant learning experience.

“Being in the U.S.A. has been great, to come to a strange country and meet wonderful people who made us feel welcomed and helped us navigate the field of diplomacy,” she said. **W**

Gail Scott is a contributing writer for *The Washington Diplomat*.



PHOTO: © 2018 THE NANCY SPERO AND LEON GOLUB FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS / LICENSED BY VAGA AT ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NY / IMAGE © TATE, LONDON, 2018

Leon Golub's “Vietnam II” is among the nearly 100 works in “Artists Respond: American Art and the Vietnam War, 1965-1975.”

## Vietnam

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Leon Golub's massive painting “Vietnam II” exposes that war machine in heartrending detail, showing U.S. soldiers armed with machine guns advancing on frightened Vietnamese civilians shielding their children in front of the charred timbers of their torched homes. Pieces of the unstretched raw canvas are cut out, creating an impression of horrors that remain hidden from view.

American soldiers, many of whom were drafted and didn't want to fight, were mocked or ignored when they came home, exacerbating PTSD symptoms that would lead to alcoholism, drug abuse and suicide among their brethren. Artwork by some Vietnam veterans in the exhibition reveals those struggles firsthand.

Jesse Treviño was drafted and wounded in battle in Vietnam, resulting in the amputation of his right arm, which he had used to paint. In “Mi Vida (My Life),” he painted scenes of his post-war life on his bedroom wall, which was later cut out of the drywall and mounted on aluminum. His prosthetic arm and Purple Heart medal obscure part of his face while a ghostly image of a soldier with both arms still intact emerges to one side.

A former Marine in Vietnam, Kim Jones created

a persona called the “Mudman” after the war and marched 18 miles across Los Angeles in 1976 carrying a structure of bound sticks and rope on his back, while his mud-coated body represented the choking red dust that swirled around the Marine supply base in Dong Ha. A ferocious battle there in 1968 left 68 American soldiers and 856 North Vietnamese fighters dead. Photos of Jones's march and an installation of the stick structure with his dusty boots reveal his vulnerable trek that forced viewers to confront the aftermath of a war they were trying to forget.

A companion exhibition by Vietnamese artist Tiffany Chung titled “Vietnam, Past Is Prologue” explores how Vietnamese artists responded to the war. She grew up in Vietnam during the war and fled to the United States with her family after her father had fought for the South Vietnamese military. The exhibition includes maps, archival research and video interviews with former Vietnamese refugees now living in the United States.

“As Vietnamese Americans living in the U.S., our narrative of the war is almost invisible,” she said in a recent interview. “I'm interested in hidden histories or histories that were erased into official records. So the histories are real. They're just not there for you to see.” **W**

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PHOTO: HBIESER / PIXABAY

Botswana is home to one-third of Africa's elephant population.