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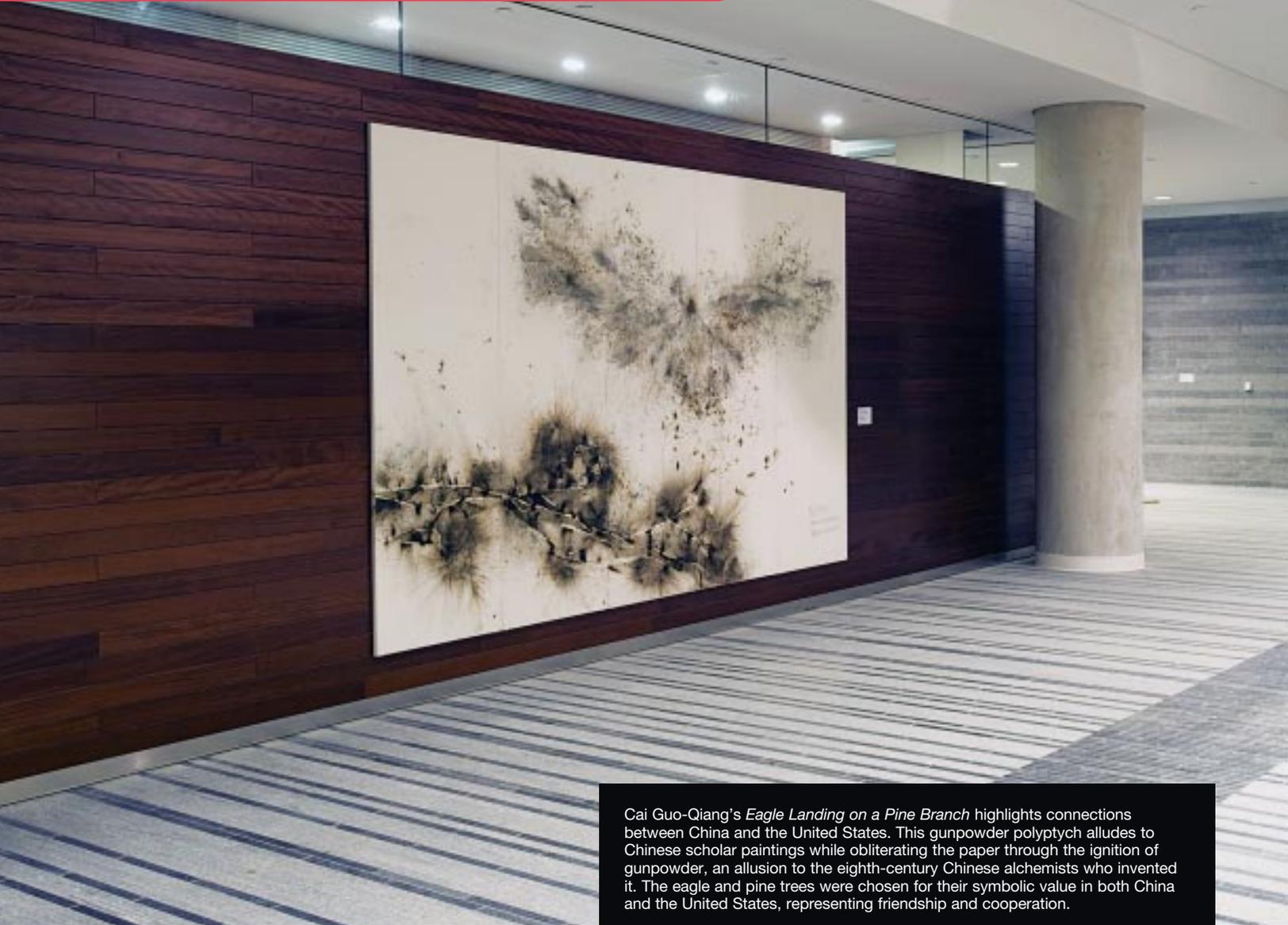
Geneva Europe's Harmonic Heart



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Cai Guo-Qiang's *Eagle Landing on a Pine Branch* highlights connections between China and the United States. This gunpowder polyptych alludes to Chinese scholar paintings while obliterating the paper through the ignition of gunpowder, an allusion to the eighth-century Chinese alchemists who invented it. The eagle and pine trees were chosen for their symbolic value in both China and the United States, representing friendship and cooperation.

10

West Meets East

Art inspired by nature graces new Beijing embassy.

24

Post of the Month

Geneva serves as the U.S. Mission to the world.

38

Perfect Match

Consulate handles all American adoptions in China.

West Meets East

ART INSPIRED BY NATURE GRACES NEW BEIJING EMBASSY **BY VIRGINIA SHORE**

In October, the ART in Embassies Program's New Embassies and Compounds division completed the third and final installation of the new permanent art collection for the new embassy compound of the U.S. Embassy in Beijing.

The collection of 48 contemporary works of art by 29 American, Chinese and Chinese-American artists graces the compound's interior and exterior spaces. The breadth of media includes paint, ceramic, photography,

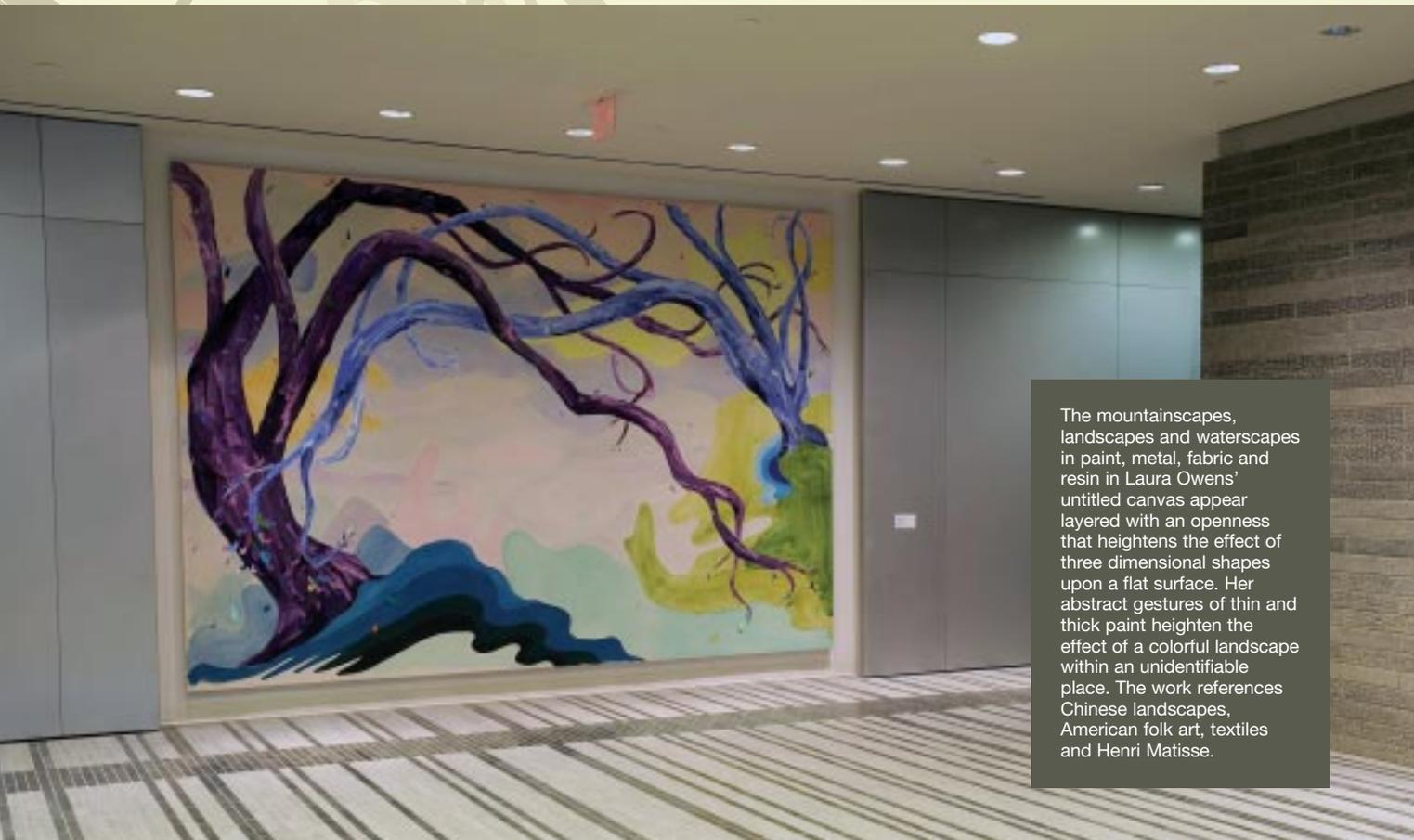
stainless steel, paper, collage, pins, gunpowder, porcelain, resin, textiles, watercolor, gouache and lacquered wood. Each work relates culturally, despite the vast range of materials and techniques, thus forming a collection reflecting the beauty, power and inspiration of nature.

With nature as muse, Chinese landscape painting emerged among the flourishing arts and literature of the Tang, Sung and Ming dynasties. The Chinese landscape painters

imbued their personal visions with a higher experience only attainable in nature, but they exceeded the realism of nature by permeating their media with atmosphere and emotion. With nature as subject matter and the Buddhist and Taoist concept of nature as the basis for man's inner harmony, the Chinese landscape painters generated a body of work that would inspire the artists, poets and writers of centuries, nations and cultures to come.

Celebrating this "landscape

of the mind" and the power of nature to enlighten, the permanent collection of the new U.S. Embassy in Beijing brings together artists who use nature to ponder universality. Through stylistic, literary, metaphorical and philosophical allusions, the artists contemplate the history of nature in the context of Chinese cultural history. The collection reminds viewers of nature's transformative potential and underscores the beauty of a pursuit that has connected American and Chinese cultures.



The mountainscapes, landscapes and waterscapes in paint, metal, fabric and resin in Laura Owens' untitled canvas appear layered with an openness that heightens the effect of three dimensional shapes upon a flat surface. Her abstract gestures of thin and thick paint heighten the effect of a colorful landscape within an unidentifiable place. The work references Chinese landscapes, American folk art, textiles and Henri Matisse.

PHOTOGRAPHS: U.S. EMBASSY IN BEIJING



Above: In the main public space of the new embassy compound's atrium, the viewer experiences Chinese landscape paintings as exemplified in Russell Crotty's *Landscapes of the Mind*. The work's three globes refer to the cosmos as well as our planet, a spherical template that conveys subtle visions of nature via ballpoint-pen ink on paper. Scrolls of land and sky are transferred to Lucite spheres suspended from the ceiling, reflecting nature as sketched in his notebooks.

Left: *Four Mountain Views*, vertical landscapes by Anne Chu, dominate the vista in the atrium and are reminiscent of Southeast Asian prayer banners. The dramatic, colored-resin bases of the works amass the weight of the "mountain" while the peak is composed of fabric attached to a metal core.



Above: Jeff Koons' monumental *Tulip* weighs more than 7,000 pounds and floats in the NEC's lotus pond. Symbolizing good luck to the Chinese, tulips originated thousands of years ago along the latitude between Northern China and Southern Europe. **Left:** Xu Bing's *Monkeys Grasping the Moon* recalls the dynamism and expressive possibilities of calligraphy and identifies "monkeys" in more than 20 languages. Referencing a popular Chinese folktale with philosophical undertones, the work involves the pursuit of a common goal that cannot be realized. **Below:** From left, Peter Lee, structural engineer; artist Xu Bing; Virginia Shore, Claire D'Alba and Imtiaz Hafiz of the ART in Embassies Program, gather in the Consular Building to install the artist's work.



PHOTOGRAPHS: U.S. EMBASSY IN BEIJING



As of March 2008, China and the United States are two of the world's top three art markets. The new contemporary art of China and the United States approaches, modifies and revitalizes long-standing traditions. Like so many of their predecessors, the American artists in the embassy's collection are inspired by China's philosophy, calligraphy, ceramics, ornamentation, architecture, religion and culture. In past decades, beginning after the Cultural Revolution, China has similarly been stimulated by the art of the West. As environmental issues abound and awareness heightens, nature continues to serve as fodder and muse, as it did in ancient China.

By pondering the universality in classical

Asian and Western forms, conceptual modes of painting often produce hybrids that can be stronger and more beautiful than their individual parts. The representational and abstract works featured in the exhibit embody the emotions triggered by landscapes. Transcending time, place, culture and philosophy, each of these artists successfully achieves communion with nature. This collection highlights the fusion of West meeting the East in extraordinary and breathtaking ways.

The catalog of the collection can be viewed on the Web site of the U.S. Embassy in Beijing. ■

The author is curator of the exhibit.

Left: Betty Woodman's *Chinese Pleasure* is a 24-foot work melding ceramic, paint, canvas and wood and spans three moments in Chinese history: abstracted Shichuan bronze "money trees," Tang Dynasty ceramics and colorful still lifes referencing pop-imagery from firecracker labels. **Below:** Arlene Shechet transforms porcelain into objects of beauty referencing historic Chinese ceramics and stupa architecture. Shechet's *Building/Beijing* includes approximately 30 separate elements that form a single installation.





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