

Wellington, New Zealand

(music)

MAN: Could I invite Ambassador McCormick to say a few words?

MCCORMICK: Welcome everyone to our home. This is our second home, our other home is in Portland, Oregon in the great northwest. And I can tell you that this has been an extraordinary experience for us. The State Department has for many years had this Arts in Embassy program and we took full advantage of it. I should say Gail did.

This Arts in Embassy program allows American art, usually valuable paintings and sculptures, to be displayed in the residences of ambassadors throughout the world, so that guests can unique art that represents the essence of the people of the United States. Gail and I believe there can be nothing more significant that represents our land than the arts of our first peoples.

(music)

MCCORMICK: We understand that this is the first time that there has been an exhibit of Native American art in any of the embassies or residences through the Arts in Embassy program. So we are having an historic night this evening. Gail and I thought it would be relevant too to extend this exhibition with examples of contemporary Native American Art from our own collection. Because Native American art is not only of the past but it deals with the contemporary perspectives on timeless themes.

But there's more. Through our friendship with leading New Zealand contemporary artist Darcy Nicholas and his wife Ann, we have been able to extend the exhibition through their collection to have examples of the major contemporary Maori artists and some of the new rising stars.

(music)

NICHOLAS: I must say that this is a wonderful gesture from you and your lovely wife Gail to host our artwork here in your residence. The beauty about this exhibition is that a lot of this is from 19 Native American indigenous tribes and every single item in that exhibition will have its own personal history and its own personal what we call (Maori term) or genealogy. So each carries its own power.

Our role is to make sure as *Tangata Whenua*, as Maori *Tangata Whenua* (People of the Land), that everything that's behind these pieces feels welcome in this house. So I've got my very close friend here, Rangitihi Tahuparae, and he's about to perform the ritual that comes from the Maori people and what it does is it makes a statement that whatever comes with these pieces from America, welcome and this land and we embrace them and we respect them.

(playing music)

(chanting and singing)

(call and response with crowd)

TAHUPARAE: You have been indeed welcomed.

(singing and playing music)

MCCORMICK: It's really one of those things where when you come to a new country and you find out what an important role the first peoples of New Zealand play and then you look back and see, wow, we have a lot to say about our first peoples in North America. So it was an easy choice. Gail took the initiative and did a lot of the work and went all through the process with the State Department and went through the process of getting our friends from the Portland Art Museum on board and I have to give her the credit for doing this.

GAIL: It's been an amazing tool for us over the last three years, to use the art as a way of showing not telling about our art, our culture, our past and how connected we are through our art. It's sort of an aesthetic tool.

(chatter)

GAIL: I think that Arts in Embassies in general is something that it's very individual to the ambassador and spouse and if they decide to use any type of exhibition, whatever rings true for that person is what's going to be right for that person. And to not be afraid to push the envelope a little bit, to decide if you want to have a modern photography exhibition that would help communicate with your host country some of the ideals and values of American society or simply because you love the piece for the beauty of the piece. The art speaks for itself.

(music)

GAIL: I feel that people should basically find what works for them because there's no wrong answer there.

(music and chatter)

GAIL: So basically what we turned our lounge in to, this is a representational space that we're in now, we turned this into an exhibition space. Which really worked out well because often times, during a reception, it's difficult to get people out of the foyer—but to bring them, to draw them in to look at the walls and to appreciate the art has been extremely effective in from a practical point of view for traffic flow, so to speak.

Sort of an interesting way for people to be diverted off of a given subject if say you have two members of Parliament who don't particularly agree, they can always go and look to the art and it's been an amazing tool for us over the last three years. By following through with my gut feeling on this project and not knowing how it would work for our space here and you also have to take into account the space that you're working with, it has paid in dividends that I can't describe on so many different levels. People have appreciated the art, they have appreciated the effort, they have appreciated the actual pieces themselves so it's been countless the amount of compliments we have received on the exhibition.

(music)

ADAMS: Art is an expression of hope and of beauty and complex ideas, of personality, of our attachment to the land, of the places we're from. So here and I think it's wonderful that it's in the ambassador's residence. Here you see that beauty and I can come halfway across the world and see objects from my people that are symbols of our hope and our life, spoons that we used to eat with that are made beautiful. You find them here, and that makes me very pleased.

GAIL: There's layers to it because you're not only respecting your own indigenous people, you're also honoring the original peoples of your host country. And people appreciate that on so many different levels, something that we had not predicted when we first took this project on. Bringing some Native American artifacts to New Zealand, that's how it started.

(music and chatter)

GUIDE: Where you are now is designated US territory.

(music)

MCCORMICK: When the summer heat begins to build and you're in the mountainous regions you get thunderstorms, you get lightening. And what happens when these fires start going in July and August, they really don't get put out until the rainy season which starts at the end of October.

GAIL: Lillian Pitt is her specialty is masks and she is sort of the Mother Superior to all these artists. And they as the saying goes, before they go to sleep at night they call Lillian Pitt.

(students talking)

(chatter outside)

GAIL: When I told Darcy that I was going to be in Oregon in September of 2006, his eyes brightened and he said, well you must come and help walk *The Eternal Threads*, was the name of the exhibition, up the Warm Springs. Warm Springs is our tribe, it's out our back door.

(bells, singing)

GAIL: So the relationships that were forged from the beginning of this Art in Embassies project created so many opportunities throughout our tenure. Here I was as an American ambassador to New Zealand back in America walking the treasure off in a very kind of wonderful ceremony.

NICHOLAS: This was a dream that many Maori weavers had over the last nine or ten years. They approached me and my gallery and museum decided that we would put it together for them with the help of the American people and the American embassy in Wellington, we were able to bring it in to this country and tour it safely through here.

(chanting)

GAIL: I think it's important to try to make connections because that's what we're doing as emissaries, as diplomats. It's our job to connect with your host country and to especially show respect and be good diplomats.

(chanting)

STRANKMAN: Thank you, thank you, Ambassador McCormick and Gail. It is truly an honor to be here today along with 21 representatives of the Native American Art Council of the Portland Art Museum who are really the ambassadors of the Native American collection from the museum. Just before we came here earlier this afternoon, our group was taken up to the top of the mountain overlooking Wellington, Mount Victoria, and I was standing there looking over the Pacific Ocean, thinking about the exchanges that have happened, this one in particular, my conversation with Darcy earlier today, and I just look forward to more exchanges such as this. And working with Darcy has made me realize that these boundaries or perceived boundaries can kind of melt away and disappear and this is one wonderful way that I think that's happened. So I look forward to sharing stories and treasures in the future between both of our countries, the United States and New Zealand.

(applause)

(chanting)

(speaking in Maori)