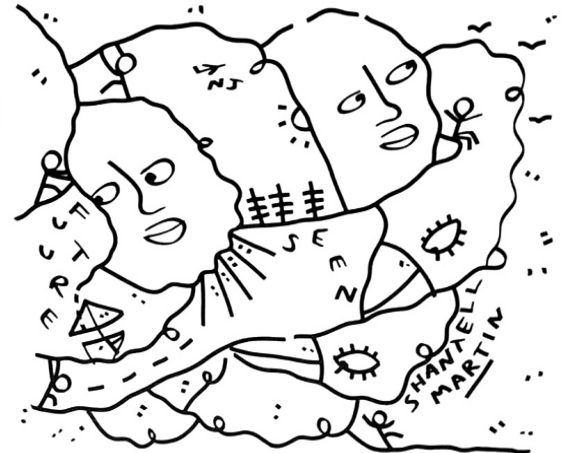


The Golden Door exhibition features works by contemporary artists exploring the American experience of immigration and migration. "I lift my lamp beside the golden door!" is the closing line from "The New Colossus," a poem by Emma Lazarus (1849–1887) engraved on a plaque on the Statue of Liberty. The sonnet includes the iconic lines, "Give me your tired, your poor / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." How that language is understood in today's political and social climate is as varied as the diverse works of art on view.

The Golden Door is neither a historic survey nor a global appraisal of the state of art by or about immigration. The exhibition showcases eleven artists whose work 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 deeply 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 hear and experience the artists' point of view, personal story, or call for action.



All of the artists currently reside in the United States, but their countries of birth include Argentina, Iran, India, Japan, Taiwan, Syria, and the United Kingdom. While some of the artists are lifelong U.S. citizens, their art and often their lives have become inextricably entwined with immigrant communities.

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.



Four hundred years ago, "America" was a country comprised of indigenous nations, of British colonizers (Jamestown, America's first English colony was founded in 1607), and the first slaves – Africans who had been seized from a Portuguese slave ship by British privateers. Two hundred years ago the United States had become a nation that defined its heritage primarily as northern European, Protestant, and British despite the strong presence of Blacks and Native peoples as well as other races, ethnicities and religions.

One hundred years ago, millions of immigrants – mainly arriving from northern and southern Europe and Russia through Ellis Island – the site of the Statue of Liberty which was dedicated in 1886 – transformed American life. The United States of America often calls itself a "nation of immigrants." Yet attitudes toward new immigrants, as expressed both by those who came before and by the laws set in place by the Congress of the United States, have vacillated between welcoming and exclusionary over the years.



No federal law restricted immigration before the 1870s. Major legislation that impacted immigration to the United States included a 1924 act that exempted Mexico and the rest of the Western Hemisphere from a quota system. The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act replaced the old quota system with a new system that did not discriminate on the basis of race or national origins. (1)

America is largely a nation of immigrants—of people, many of whom fled violence and persecution, in search of a better life for themselves and their families. As debates on immigration continue to engulf our nation, the artists whose personal stories unfold here are especially timely. Each artists' narrative—diverse in material, style, subject and identity—acts as a catalyst for creating meaningful connections between individuals with differing experiences. Our nation thrives on cultural encounters. Our arts embody our diversity, reflecting and merging rich traditions to create something new.

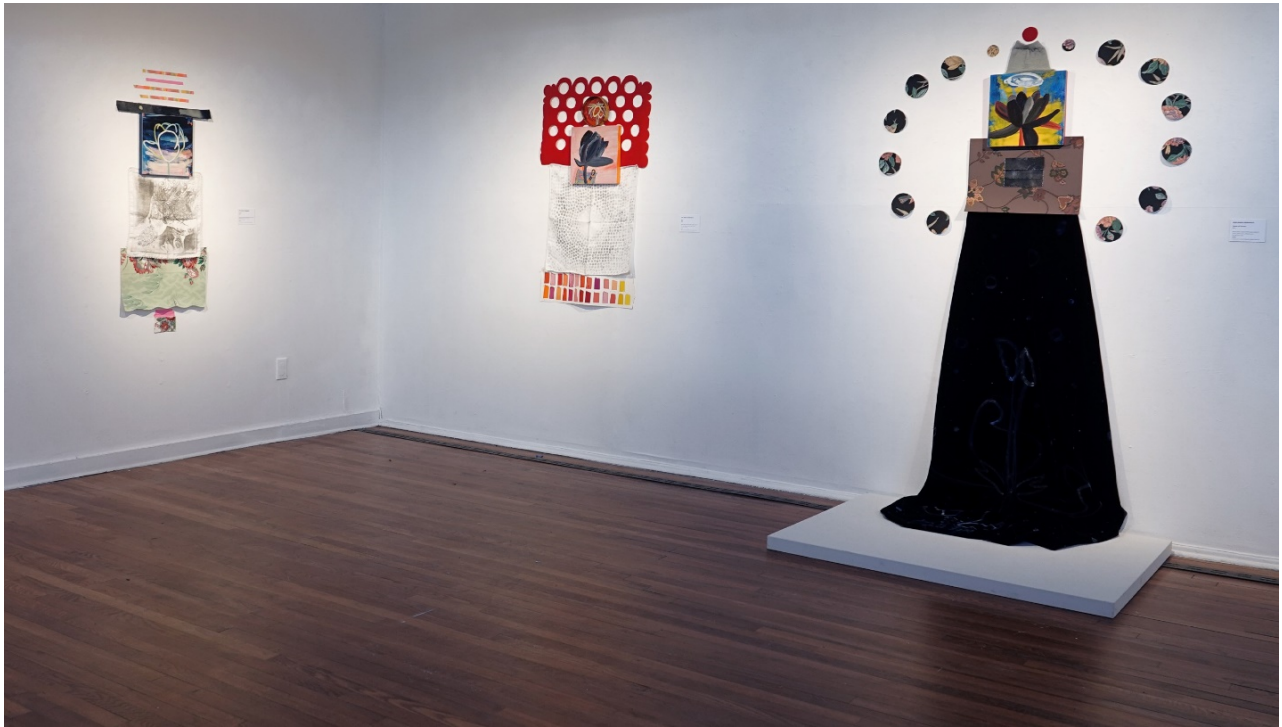
The Golden Door celebrates America's creativity and cultural heritage, indelibly enriched by multicultural exchange. Our culture defines our views, behaviors and beliefs. Sometimes it is easier to surround ourselves with people that are 'like us,' whether it is skin color, ethnicity, gender, class or religion. However, understanding different cultures can help us build a sense of community and celebrate diversity. The artists whose personal stories unfold in The Golden Door are making America a more creative place.

As debates on immigration continue to engulf our nation, these works of art that express the personal stories of immigrants, told in the language of art, are especially timely. Each work of art—diverse in material, style, subject and identity—acts as a catalyst for creating meaningful connections between individuals with differing experiences. The artists included in The Golden Door were born between 1947 and 1984. Their continents of ancestry include Africa, Asia, Europe, North America and South America. The United States of America thrives on cultural encounters. At their best, the arts embody our diversity, reflecting and merging rich traditions to create something new.

Knowing that history has a tendency to repeat itself, these contemporary interpretations of immigration, migration and identify prompt important questions for the viewer. The works of art, which range from profoundly personal and emotional narratives to political and social statements, bring stories of immigration and migration viscerally to life and help us understand and appreciate the human history, culture, values, and beliefs in our "nation of immigrants."

As you walk the galleries and look at the works of art on view, recall your own history of feeling "included" or "excluded"; of moving your home and family across town or across continents; of finding your place in a new school, a new job, or in an expanded family. What creates a sense of place or belonging for you? Imagine the works of art presented in The Golden Door as touchstones for your own journey of learning and understanding. What object or image that you see might connect to your history? Perhaps, a family photograph, a piece of clothing, a religious ritual or a community celebration.





The artist is the hero of our story, crafting their own light – not held high over their heads in monumental fashion like that of the Statue of Liberty – but, finding a way to communicate person-to-person, telling not only their own stories, but the narratives of a people - not in terms symbolic or larger than life, but at human scale, encouraging dialogue in a challenge to the expectations of society at large and a world of art and dialog and cultural change much closer to home.

1. Excerpted from Lepore, Jill, *These Truths: A History of the United States* (New York, W.W. Norton, 2018) p. 674