

## US Ambassador turns London home into space for contemporary art

Works by leading British and American artists unveiled in Winfield House

By Javier Pes.

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Susie MacMurray's pheasant feather work, *Masquerade*, 2014, in the Green Room of Winfield House. Photo: courtesy of the artist, Danese/Corey and Merville Galleries

The new US Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Matthew Barzun, and his wife hosted a reception at their official home in London yesterday to unveil a display of works of contemporary art by US and British artists in the grand rooms of Winfield House.

The installation of works by American artists, including Kehinde Wiley, Glenn Ligon, Spencer Finch and Roxy Paine, and British artists Cornelia Parker, Susie MacMurray and Julian Stair, has been organised by the Barzuns with Art in Embassies, which is part of the US Department of State. The

majority of the works are on loan from private collectors or the artists via their galleries.

Works are found in the two dining rooms, main hall, on the staircase as well as on the terrace of the 35-room mansion, which is set in 15-acres of garden. Winfield House was built in the 1930s by the Woolworth heiress Barbara Hutton who sold it to the US government for a token \$1 in the 1950s.

At the informal event, attended by artists including Tracey Emin, Michael Craig-Martin, whose work *Untitled Corkscrew*, 2012, hangs over the fireplace in the family dining room, Matthew Barzun spoke of the soft power of contemporary art to foster dialogue and understanding. "Cultural diplomacy is no longer an oxymoron," he said. He praised his wife, Brooke Brown Barzun, for helping him discover contemporary art and its ability to help an uptight New Englander like him and others to relax and open themselves up to different perspectives.

Barzun, the grandson of the French-born, American historian Jacques Barzun, was raised in Massachusetts and educated at Harvard. He made his money with the news and reviews website CNET, before starting his own consultancy for internet media firms. He was one of President Obama's key fundraisers.

Brooke Brown Barzun is an art curator and the heiress to the company best known for distilling Jack Daniel's whiskey. The Barzun's family home is in Kentucky where her late father was a major supporter of the Speed Art Museum in Louisville. She has stepped into his shoes, co-chairing its \$50m capital campaign, which is partly funding an expansion due to be completed in 2016. Last year, the Brown family announced a \$18m donation to the project.

Meanwhile, construction of the new US Embassy building in Nine Elms, south London, is progressing rapidly, which will provide ample wall space in addition to Winfield House for Art in Embassies and the Barzuns to hang contemporary art.



Susie MacMurray's *Widow*, 2009, (Collection Manchester Art Gallery) in the Green Room of Winfield House. Photo: courtesy of the artist, Danese/Corey and Merville Galleries