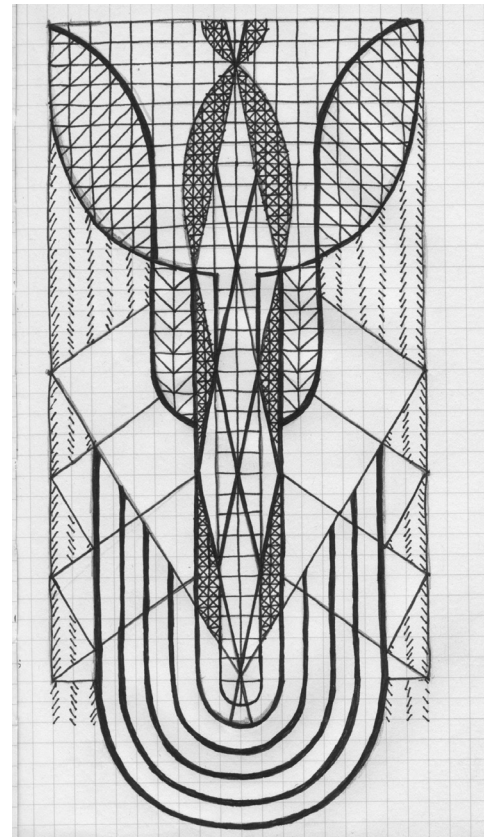
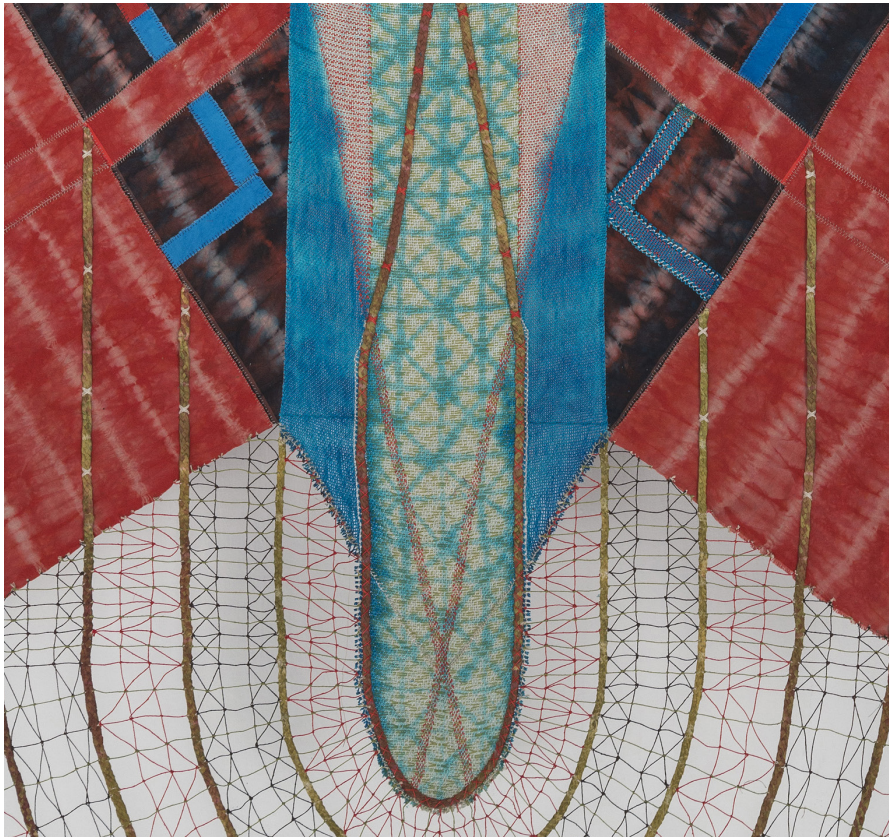


The commission

Julia Bland braids, weaves, pulls apart and remakes her threads to create artworks with geometry and rhythm. *Malaika Byng* hears about her ambitious piece for the US Embassy in Kampala



WELMOED LAANSTRA Curator, *Art in Embassies,* government of the USA

'I discovered Julia's work in a small gallery in downtown New York, before Derek Eller Gallery began representing her. After reading about the show in the *New York Times*, I travelled up from Washington DC to see it. I was intrigued by how she combines so many different materials and techniques, and how each of her artworks has a rhythm to it. She continually pushes the possibilities of textiles, while drawing on her training as a painter.

Julia's work embodies the energy of American craft today and – although she wasn't able to

travel to Uganda to explore the context and local culture due to Covid restrictions – the visual language of her pieces connects to the vibrant, geometric local textile and basketry traditions. We wanted it to feel familiar to the Ugandan people who visit the building, which is important when we commission artworks for embassies. We aim to create a dialogue between American culture and that of the country the building is located in, as well as the other artists represented.

For this embassy in Kampala, we have also commissioned a piece by Ugandan artist Sanaa Gateja, who collaborates with a women's co-operative to create beads from recycled paper. Julia's work will hang in a large entrance

that bridges the old and new sections of the building, which has recently been extended by American architecture practice BNIM. It will cover a wall that stretches about 2.5 storeys, so it will be viewed from the ground floor and through windows on the second. The piece posed an additional challenge to Julia: because people will be able to glimpse parts of it from various vantage points without seeing the work in its entirety, she has had to create different areas of interests. The detail of her work lends itself to this.'

Right: Julia Bland in front of *A Big Sky for Many Weathers*, 2021, and above: a detail and a working drawing of the design

JULIA BLAND Artist

'It was difficult but liberating to work on a commission of this scale. At 580 by 319cm, *A Big Sky for Many Weathers* is double the size of my largest piece to date, so there was a lot of space to let loose in. It was a leap of faith to work on something that you can't view all at once when you're making it, but weaving anything on a loom is always that way – even with preparatory drawings, you can't completely control the outcome.

When visitors enter the space, they will look up and see the piece reaching down to them, and then stretching back upward. I wanted it to have a focal point, rather than just be a geometric environment, so the composition is loosely based on the form of a tree, incorporating shapes and movements that evoke both grounding and growth. I've always been interested in tree forms because, in reaching upward, they seem to be striving for something. Their architecture is very complex – there's a mathematical logic to it, yet it's also visually unpredictable because of how it is affected by weather and light.

The work will be seen from different storeys, so it has three geometric and curvilinear points of intersection, at the top, middle and bottom. The bottom of the piece incorporates ropes that swoop down and back up again, playing with both the gravity and continuity of the hanging textile.

My process has different entry points – sometimes I'll start with a grid of hanging threads, but in this case I began with the form of the tree and it spread out from there. I wove the tree on the loom using cotton and linen yarn – the materials had to be hardwearing for the embassy – which I dyed in different ways using a variety of water-based inks. The ropes are made from bedsheets which I tie-dyed and braided many times. I often use or recycle materials that relate to my personal history, such as the Belgian linen I've incorporated here that is typically used for canvases – it connects with Western art history and my own education as a painter. Sometimes I'll pull a piece of fabric apart: to me, unmaking is also a form of making. It reflects the fact that history is not pre-determined; things are always in flux.'

juliabland.net