

*The Thorn Flags 2012 – 2021*

Over the past several years I have made a series of American flags using thorns from the honey locust tree.

The thorns are both elegant and daunting. I find them an apt material to express the elegant, yet fractious nature, of American democracy. For some, the thorn flag implies questions related to the separation of church and state. For others, the flag offers powerful metaphors regarding the pervasive influence of American democracy coupled with its unexpected fragility.

The first three flags were mounted on the wall in two galleries and an arts administration venue. The most recent were suspended -- one in the alcove of a church in Como, Italy, as part of an international exhibition in 2019, the other in a solo exhibition in Kansas City, Missouri in 2021.

The first flag, in 2012, was in the exhibition, *I Am An American*. This two-person exhibition with a Korean artist holding dual citizenship, addressed the issue of immigration and asked the question, who was the “real” American?

The most recent flag was installed in January 2021, after the contentious presidential election and the events of January 6. It was the most distressed, with gaping holes and fragments falling on the floor.

I am prepared to install another iteration of the American flag in the fall of 2024 during the next presidential election. That election promises to be even more fractious, divisive, contentious than any over the past many years.

I anticipate that *Flag VI* will reflect the mood and the spirit of the nation at that time.

Susan White  
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