Tiger Fable, 1990 45 x 48, private collection, Photo E.G. Schempf

Cloth As Community:
Hmong Textiles In America
# Cloth as Community: Hmong Textiles in America

### Programming Guide

## Table of Contents

### Exhibition Overview

- Exhibition Description ........................................................................................................... 2
- Educational Materials Checklist .......................................................................................... 4
- How to Contact ExhibitsUSA .............................................................................................. 5

### Exhibition Reference Materials

- Exhibition Essay and Text Panels ....................................................................................... 6
- Exhibition Checklist .............................................................................................................. 9
- Bibliography and Media Resources ..................................................................................... 15
- Web Resources ................................................................................................................... 17

### Programming Resources

- Exhibition Inspired Programming Ideas ............................................................................ 19
- Film Screening Copyright .................................................................................................. 20
- List of Speakers .................................................................................................................. 22
- Community and Regional Program Resources .................................................................. 27

### Educator Resources

- Facts for Docents and Teachers .......................................................................................... 28
- Glossary ............................................................................................................................... 30
- Topics for Gallery or Classroom Discussion ....................................................................... 33
- Reproduction Authorization for Educational Images .......................................................... 35
- Common Core Inspired Lesson Idea for the Classroom ...................................................... 36
- Hmong Pattern Design Activity .......................................................................................... 43
**Exhibition Overview**

This ExhibitsUSA programming guide provides educational resources and program/activity ideas for education curators, docents, and teachers. We hope these materials are useful tools to make *Cloth as Community: Hmong Textiles in America* a success for your organization and your community. The programming guide CD is yours to keep. Each venue receives a copy, so please **DO NOT** return it to Mid-America Arts Alliance. Access to the programming guide is also available through the ExhibitsUSA website at www.eusa.org. Please contact Kristy Peterson, at 800-473-3872, ext. 229, if you have any questions or suggestions regarding the content of this guide.

**In order to help serve you and other venues, please take a few moments to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of this programming guide with the form located with the programming guide materials.** When completed, please return it to us via the provided self-addressed stamped envelope or fax the form to 816-421-3918 (attention: Kristy Peterson). You may also scan and e-mail the form as a PDF to kristy@maaa.org.

To assist other venues in making best use of this exhibition and for the purpose of sharing successful ideas or giving helpful advice, please consider making use of the online resource center (idea exchange) to relay any information you wish to share with fellow museum colleagues about your successful programs inspired by this exhibition. Visit www.eusa.org and click on exhibitions to locate the resources page tied to this exhibition. Note, a log-in password is required to access resources. Please contact client relations at 800-473-3872 if you need assistance.

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**Exhibition Description**

**Cloth as Community: Hmong Textiles in America**

Hmong “flower cloth” or *paj ntaub* (pronounced pan dow), is one of the world’s great textile traditions and exemplar of cloth as community. However, this complex art was not widely known outside of Asia until after the Vietnam War, when Hmong refugees began immigrating to the United States in the late 1970s. They brought their needlework art, a tradition passed down in cloth for generations. *Cloth as Community: Hmong Textiles in America* features 28 Hmong textiles, including designs derived from traditional *paj ntaub* and the embroidered story cloth form that developed in Hmong refugee camps in Thailand.

The story of Hmong textile production in the diaspora reflects the radical upheaval in the external environment that Hmong refugees experienced. In traditional Hmong life in Asia, women produced complex clothing that established clan identity through abstract geometric designs in the textiles, created by embroidery, appliqué, reverse appliqué, and indigo batik (by Green Hmong—an ethnic sub-group of the Hmong distinguished by
dialect and clan affiliation). The designs reflect a deep animist philosophy that is inspired by nature, and they continue to influence the aesthetic choices of contemporary makers. Historically, textiles in village life were not sold. Instead, they provided important spiritual protection, such as the colorful baby carriers and hats designed to disguise children from evil forest spirits. In refugee camps—and later the diaspora—the sale of Hmong textiles generated important income for families, leading to design changes and new inventions such as the embroidered story cloth.

This shift from a geometric, very stylized ornamental art to a pictorial or quasi-representational embroidered art was highly unusual, and it provides another fascinating aspect of the textiles as cultural text. Escape narratives were the predominant theme of story cloths made in the refugee camps, revealing a new Hmong concern with geo-political borders, as crossing the swift Mekong River to safety in Thailand was the route for most Hmong who left Laos. Many Hmong drowned or were shot when attempting the crossing. This narrative became a central element in most early story cloths, as did the incorporation of text in Hmong and later in English. Yet, as the memory of the war receded and U.S. buyers required more sanguine subjects, many of the story cloth subjects morphed into representations of Hmong refugee’s new life in America. The exhibition includes examples of this shift, through works depicting a nativity scene, nostalgia for the pastoral life left behind, animals in a jungle, scenes of village life, and illustrated Hmong folk tales with English text.

The works in this exhibition demonstrate a period in time when traditional paj ntaub influenced new designs; when works were produced at a larger scale or with more space devoted to the triangular borders; and in which embroidered story cloths changed to fit a new market that was different from tourists or relief workers in the camps. They illustrate the profound relevance of textiles as infrastructure in Hmong social fabric has never been part of a fixed cultural tableau, even as the narrative is adapted to fit new realities.

This EUSA exhibition was first curated in 1999 by Carl Magnuson, a cultural anthropologist, who worked with a Hmong refugee community. Curatorial updates have been done by Geraldine Craig, who has published more than a hundred essays on contemporary art and Hmong textiles, in venues such as the Hmong Studies Journal, The Journal of Modern Craft, Art in America and Surface Design Journal. Craig is currently Department Head of Art at Kansas State University, and previously served for six years as Assistant Director for Academic Programs at Cranbrook Academy of Art.
Exhibition Overview

Several support materials are traveling with the exhibition. Should any of these materials be missing or fail to arrive, please contact the ExhibitsUSA Client Relations Department, at 800-473-3872 and we will locate or replace the missing items as soon as possible. **Please repack these items in the crates before sending the exhibition to the next venue.**

Books


Books for Children


DVD


Exhibition Overview

If you have any questions or comments, ExhibitsUSA is just a phone call away at 800-473-3872. We can also be reached by e-mail at the addresses listed below. For questions about specific topics, please consult the following list.

Frequently asked questions regarding: Contact
Scheduling an exhibition, exhibition contracts, general questions, problems, or requests Dottie Martin
Client Relations
dottie@maaa.org
ext. 208

Shipping, installation, or packing Michelle Wolfe
Registrar
michelle@maaa.org
ext. 217

Educational materials or program resources Kristy Peterson
Education Curator
kristy@maaa.org
ext. 229

Proposing an exhibition Kathy Dowell
Director of Arts & Humanities Programming
kathy@maaa.org
ext. 220

ExhibitsUSA
2018 Baltimore Avenue
Kansas City, Missouri 64108
Phone (toll free): 800-473-EUSA (3872)
Fax: 816-421-3918
http://www.eusa.org/
**Traditions and Spiritual Protections**

*Paj ntaub* (pronounced pan dow and translates as “flower cloth”) garments and needlework have always indicated Hmong ethnic identity distinct from national borders or citizenship. The complex textiles were connected to important traditions and Hmong spiritual beliefs. For example, it was believed that colorful baby carriers and hats would disguise a child from evil spirits who might try to steal a child’s soul. The complex designs of mazes and intricate lines were thought to confuse and disorient the evil forest spirits, and send them in the wrong direction. Equally important were the designed borders of the baby carrier, believed to serve a ritual protective function by holding in the soul of a sleeping child and keeping it close to the mother’s body. The triangle shapes on borders, most commonly identified as mountains and teeth, also added to the defensive function of the garment. Examine *Baby Carrier* by May Her Thao to see these design elements.

Textiles with specific “way-finding” patterns stitched by family members were essential elements in burial garments and funeral rituals, to help “show the way” back to ancestors for the deceased. The use of natural fibers, such as hemp and cotton, was symbolically significant, as synthetic materials would not by absorbed by the earth. It was important to show love for family members by stitching the necessary garments long before they would be needed. *Funeral Square* by Ah Vang and *Funeral Coat* by Nou Thao are great examples of burial materials.

Without containing any literal text or alphabet, textiles also served as “cultural texts” and embodied significant cultural practices that bound Hmong communities together from birth into the afterlife.

**Conditions for Innovation**

With the displacement from rural villages into military settlements and refugee camps, then the diaspora, the culturally new practice of selling textiles generated important income for families who could no longer practice subsistence farming. Hmong textile producers were encouraged by relief workers and organizations to use their skills to develop new commodities. Some traditional geometric designs were maintained, but the Hmong were encouraged to use non-traditional colors and forms—squares for coasters, wall hangings, pillows, etc. (Anthropologist Eric Cohen’s research indicates that similar adapted *paj ntaub* squares for sale to tourists had begun in Laos as early as the 1950s, but that production and commerce was limited to the least isolated villages.) *Grey Buds* by Houa Yang and *Navy Elephant’s Foot* by Mee Her are examples of the subdued colors considered more saleable to Western audiences than the traditional, more flower-like bright colors.

The freedom to combine and re-interpret aesthetic traditions accelerated dramatically in the refugee camps with the new Hmong textile form—the embroidered pictorial story
cloth. It is commonly reported that foreign relief workers caring for the Hmong in the refugee camps in Thailand suggested the format of “illustrated” cloths when the Hmong men were being taught to read and write. As the pictorial story cloth progressed, the Hmong Romanized Popular Alphabet (RPA script) and later English text were incorporated—sometimes as titles of the works and/or as explanatory narrative paired with the images. The overt commodification of paj ntaub in the camps changed even the producers. Traditionally textiles were created by women only, but Hmong men began sewing or drawing images onto cloth. Possibly this was from boredom, but also perhaps as a way to help provide for their families, and maintain their role in the social economic structure and cultural hierarchy.

This was also the time when some textile makers began to include their name on their work. Prior to the war, the concept of artistic ownership of ideas or solitary genius wasn’t prevalent, and paj ntaub were not created with a Western view of art for visual contemplation. Textiles were used, not preserved. Also, while no maker was completely anonymous within a traditional clan or village, the economic and cultural value of artistic attribution evolved with commodity production, as textiles became part of a flow of goods outside the local community.

**Narrative and Nostalgia**

Whatever the genesis of story cloths, Hmong people quickly saw it as another way to tell the story of the Hmong, by Hmong. As historic texts, story cloths are adapted textile forms that document the tragedy of war, cultural upheaval, and reconstituted communities—thus another example of the Hmong recording and even translating culture in cloth. While textile production in Asian village life before the war was local and specific to family or community rituals, the economic potential played out in the camps, making Hmong textiles global and transnational commodities within a few short years. Non-traditional forms, like story cloths, moved from the camps to remote Laotian villages, influencing producers there. Today, most story cloths sold in the United States are made by Hmong relatives in Laos and shipped overseas. Escape narratives with graphic depictions of war and migration were all vital subjects in this new form of cultural text. Soon after 1975 and the end of the Vietnam War, traditional folk tales and scenes of bucolic village life began to appear embroidered into story cloths, as Hmong looked to a past that was unknown to the youngest generation.

It is unclear whether U.S. buyers required less difficult subjects than bombs, burning villages, and soldiers with guns. Possibly the story cloth producers wisely saw that embroidering stories from Hmong history—traditionally passed down orally—was another way to hold onto ephemeral aspects of Hmong history. *Tiger Fable* is a typical folktale seen often in story cloths. Many story cloth subjects also morphed into representations of a new life after immigration to America. The nativity scene in the charming *Jesus’ Birthday* featured in this exhibition is one example. Other works in this
exhibition demonstrate nostalgia for the homeland and the life left behind, such as in Dia Her’s *Wedding Scene* or *Shaman*.

**Contemporary Realities**

The works in the exhibition also show how cultural narratives and forms are adapted to fit new realities and visual influences. So Moua used the counted cross-stitch technique traditionally used for abstract geometric designs to depict figures in *Four Standing Females*. Referring to images of women in fashion and digital media, this work simultaneously documents how dress codes or categories for Hmong sub-groups’ (varied clans) use identifying costume elements (such as blue skirt, white skirt, striped sleeves, etc.) have relaxed. Today, there is a disregard for intra-group distinctions—what anthropologist Louisa Schein terms a “decisive announcement of pan-ethnic identity.” Freedom from more fixed clothing conventions offers opportunity to transcend national borders to consume and participate in culture with co-ethnics through the transnational traffic in costume elements.

Today a Hmong New Year outfit might include elements stitched in Asia or Europe, or by the wearer, or her family members, with fabrics sourced in local outlets but manufactured all over the world. Pleated polyester skirts worn most frequently in Laos and at New Year celebrations held in the U. S. are manufactured in China, and are usually either plain white or machine printed to resemble the traditional indigo batik and embroidery patterns made by Green Hmong (an ethnic sub-group of the Hmong distinguished by dialect and clan affiliation). Young Hmong women today often continue to produce the counted cross-stitch apron—as this is the needlework skill that is taught first to young Hmong girls. As Hmong American women seek identity and self-determinism through more urban avenues than was possible for previous Hmong generations, they often do not choose to produce textiles such as those seen in this exhibition. However, the continuation of sewing as a practice with contemporary relevance is constantly redefined, as young artists and fashion designers are finding new inspiration from Hmong history, cloth, and community.
Exhibition Reference Materials

Traditions and Spiritual Protections

1. Mai Chang
   Cross Stitch
   ca. 1990
   cotton
   10 1/4 x 10 3/8 inches

2. Ying Yang
   Green Cross Stitch
   ca. 1990
   cotton
   10 x 9 7/8 inches

3. Dia Her
   Green and Red
   ca. 1990
   cotton
   18 3/8 x 18 5/8 inches

4. Ah Vang
   Funeral Square
   ca. 1990
   cotton
   21 1/2 x 20 3/4 inches

5. Shoua Xiong
   Batik
   ca. 1990
   cotton
   29 1/2 x 28 3/4 inches
6. Nou Thao
   *Funeral Coat*
   ca. 1990
   cotton
   42 1/4 x 48 inches

7. May Her Thao
   *Baby Carrier*
   ca. 1990
   cotton
   40 3/4 x 63 1/2 inches

**Conditions for Innovation**

8. Pla Yang
   *Red and Black*
   ca. 1990
   cotton
   8 1/2 x 8 inches

9. Youa Her
   *Black and White*
   ca. 1990
   cotton
   11 11/16 x 26 1/2 inches

10. Mee Her
    *Navy Elephant’s Foot*
    ca. 1990
    cotton
    18 1/2 x 18 3/8 inches

11. So Moua
    *Purple and Green*
    ca. 1990
    cotton
    18 1/8 x 18 1/8 inches
12. Pla Yang
Pillowcase
ca. 1990
cotton
18 1/4 x 19 inches

13. Tan Xiong
Blue Elephant’s Foot
ca. 1990
cotton
26 3/4 x 26 1/2 inches

14. So Moua
Black and Yellow
ca. 1990
cotton
20 1/4 x 20 inches

Narrative and Nostalgia

15. Txong Yang
Blue Chain Stitch
ca. 1990
cotton
22 1/4 x 22 1/4 inches

16. Pla Her
Blue Star
ca. 1990
cotton
23 1/4 x 22 1/2 inches
17. Artist unknown
*Jesus' Birthday*
ca. 1990
cotton
32 1/2 x 33 1/2 inches

18. Artist unknown
*Shaman*
ca. 1990
cotton
33 1/2 x 33 3/4 inches

19. Dia Her
*Wedding Scene*
ca. 1990
cotton
30 7/8 x 33 inches

20. Artist unknown
*Tiger Fable*
ca. 1990
cotton
44 3/4 x 47 1/2 inches

Contemporary Realities

21. Mai Chang
*Small Elephant's Foot Appliqué*
ca. 1990
cotton
7 1/8 x 7 1/8 inches
22. Sae Her
*Elephant's Foot*
ca. 1990
cotton
16 x 15 ¾ inches

23. So Moua
*Four Standing Females*
ca. 1990
cotton
22 1/4 x 28 inches

24. Artist unknown
*Story Piece (Birds, Monkeys, Mongoose, and Deer)*
ca. 1990
cotton
35 1/8 x 34 1/8 inches

25. Artist unknown
*Farm Scene*
ca. 1990
cotton
33 7/8 x 33 1/2 inches

26. May Her Thao
*Large Aqua Cross Stitch*
1985
cotton
43 1/2 x 43 inches

27. So Moua
*Animal Scene*
ca. 1990
cotton
61 x 63 inches
28. Houa Yang

*Grey Buds*

ca. 1990

cotton

20 3/8 x 20 3/8 inches
**Exhibition Reference Materials**  **Bibliography / Media Resources**

**Books**  (*materials with an asterisk travel with the exhibition)*


**Books for Children**


**DVDs**


### Exhibition Reference Materials

**Artisans of Asia**  
This webpage contains textile design styles and information about Hmong story cloths.  
http://www.artisansofasia.com/traditional_textile.php

**Asian Nation: Asian American History, Demographics, and Issues**  
Web resources that conveys data about Asian populations across the world. This link shares ethnic census data about the Hmong.  
http://www.asian-nation.org/hmong.shtml

**Hmong American Friendship Association, Inc.**  
This non-profit organization in the Milwaukee region provides social services to Southeast Asian refugees and has a display of Hmong arts and artifacts as part of an onsite museum.  
http://www.hmongamer.org/

**Hmong Culture**  
Links to Hmong books, products to purchase (textiles) and information about cultural holidays and history.  
http://www.hmongculture.net/home

**Hmong Cultural Center**  
This is the parent website of the online Hmong Embroidery Museum and also features a resource library and much more.  
http://www.hmongcc.org/

**Hmong Cultural Profile**  
This page provides an historical and cultural synopsis of the Hmong people.  
http://ethnomed.org/culture/hmong/hmong-cultural-profile

**Hmong Embroidery Museum**  
This website is part of the Hmong Cultural Center in Saint Paul, Minnesota and features in-depth information about Hmong needlework.  
http://www.hmongembroidery.org/
Hmong Motifs and Symbols
This website explains many of the symbols and patterns incorporated in Hmong textiles and art.
http://www.hmongembroidery.org/symbols.html

Hmong Resource Center Library
A comprehensive Hmong Studies Scholarly Collection Open to the Community.
http://www.hmonglibrary.org/hmong-studies-virtual-library.html

Hmong Story Cloth
The Kansas Historical Foundation features a webpage that describes a Hmong story cloth in the collection. This page has contextual information about the textile tradition and Hmong people.
http://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/cool-things-hmong-story-cloth/10367

Hmong Story Cloths and Hmong Books
This is an online Hmong bookseller dedicated to promoting Hmong crafts and books.

Hmong Textiles
This is a digital image collection of various textile patterns/designs from the University of California, Irvine library.
http://www.lib.uci.edu/libraries/collections/sea/hmong.html#

Learn About the Hmong
This website has a downloadable “Hmong 101” presentation that contains statistics and facts about Hmong culture and U.S. Hmong immigrants.
http://www.learnabouthmong.net/

Minnesota Historical Society/Hmong
This webpage, which is part of the Minnesota Historical Society, contains quick facts about the Hmong community in Minnesota and across the United States.
http://education.mnhs.org/immigration/communities/hmong
Programming Resources  Exhibition Inspired Programming Ideas

Teacher Curricular Workshop
Hmong Art, History, and Culture
Invite local K-12 teachers to explore and design curricular connections for their students inspired by topics communicated through the exhibition content. Topics such as physical and cultural geography of China, Thailand, and Laos; visual art; history; anthropology; the Vietnam War; U.S. Immigration; and textile traditions around the world, can all be explored using Hmong textiles as a centerpiece for discussion and teaching. Host a teacher workshop as an open house and a professional development workshop to assist educators in making curricular connections for their students.

Performance: Hmong Traditions and Perspectives
With collaboration from the Hmong Cultural Center in Saint Paul, Minnesota, or the local Hmong community in your area or region, plan a program that showcases traditional dress, dance, folk customs, Hmong history, or other aspects of Hmong culture in relation to the textile works in the exhibition. Examples might include: a Hmong dance performance, a Hmong fashion show, a Hmong demonstration of needlework or a musical performance featuring traditional Hmong instruments like the qeeq. (Contact the Hmong Cultural Center listed in the web resources for contact information to locate regional Hmong dance performance troupes, Hmong musicians, other Hmong cultural centers, etc.).

Film Screening and Discussion
From the suggested list of documentary films in the bibliography of the programming guide, curate a film series about Hmong diaspora and Hmong American immigration or Hmong involvement in the Vietnam War to contextualize culture. Please read the section about film copyright in this programming guide before you host a screening and contact the filmmakers for rights to screen these films.

Book Reading: Hmong Memoirs
Use Kao Kalia Yang’s book, The Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir as a centerpiece for a storytelling and a bookclub program. Invite the author Kao Kalia Yang and/or members of the local Hmong community to share their family stories related to relocation to and settlement in the United States.

Hands-On Workshop: Hmong-Inspired Printed Design
Using Hmong motifs and symbols (found on the website www.hmongembroidery.org) host a design workshop taught by a local professional teaching artist/print maker or graphic artist (and if possible, together with a Hmong community member who creates paj ntoub) that integrates Hmong stylized designs of real world objects (incorporated into paj ntoub) and relief printmaking or screenprinting. Invite participants to study the paj ntoub on view in the exhibition, learn about various motifs and symbols used by the
Hmong from the [www.hmongembroidery.org](http://www.hmongembroidery.org) website, then design an image to print on paper, a t-shirt, or a piece of cloth.

**Various Public Lecture/Discussion Topic Ideas**
*(Refer to the list of suggested speakers in the programming guide to connect these lecture/discussion topics to vetted expert speakers across the country).*

**Textile Talk: The Story of Story Cloths and *Paj Ntaub***
What do particular stitching patterns, symbols, or Hmong traditional garments communicate as part of Hmong culture? Invite Geraldine Craig, Hmong textile expert and curator of *Cloth as Community: Hmong Textiles in America* to share information about Hmong cultural textile traditions, traditional embroidered designs, appliqué and stitching techniques and what they mean to the Hmong.

**Hmong on the Move**
Invite an historian or pair of experts on Asian studies and Hmong culture to share the history of the Hmong in China and Southeast Asia and contextualize the Hmong’s role in the Vietnam War and their subsequent persecution and later plight as refugees in the aftermath of the Vietnam War.

**Hmong Folktales and Legends**
Host a speaker who is an expert on Hmong ethnography and cultural traditions to share Hmong folktales, aspects of Hmong festivals such as the New Year’s Festival or other traditional celebrations, and aspects of Hmong history in relation to illustrations found in Hmong textiles featured in the exhibition (wedding ceremonies, funeral customs, healing traditions, and other designs, subject matter, or symbols present in the work).

**History and Future of the Hmong**
Invite speakers who are experts on Hmong history, immigration, resettlement, and contemporary Hmong census data to share information and perspectives on challenges the Hmong have faced in the past and opportunities and challenges for Hmong Americans and/or the Hmong today in the United States, China, and Thailand.

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**Programming Resources**

**Film Screening and Copyright**

*IF YOU PLAN TO HOST A FILM SCREENING AS A PUBLIC PROGRAM, YOU MUST OBTAIN A LICENSE OR OBTAIN PERMISSION TO LEGALLY PUBLICLY SCREEN MOST FILMS AT YOUR SITE. PLEASE DOUBLE CHECK THAT YOU HAVE PERMISSION TO SCREEN THE DVD (OR FILM IF YOU ARE RENTING A PRINT) PUBLICLY AT YOUR SITE.*

Neither the rental nor the purchase or lending of a videocassette or DVD carries with it the right to exhibit such a movie publicly outside the home, unless the site where the video is used is properly licensed for copyright compliant exhibition. The movie studios
who own copyrights, and their agents, are the only parties who are authorized to license sites such as museums, film societies, parks and recreation departments, businesses, etc. No other group or person has the right to exhibit or license exhibitions of copyrighted movies. Furthermore, copyrighted movies borrowed from other sources such as public libraries, colleges, personal collections, etc. cannot be used legally for showing in colleges or universities or in any other site that is not properly licensed.

CONTACT the film distributor in advance of your film screening to obtain a license and or rent the film. For crowds of less than 200 people, a one-time screening license is approximately $99-350 (or may be less depending on the distributor etc.)

PBS will allow videos to be shown in a classroom or screened for a public group for educational purposes when no admission is charged for the viewing. The transmission must be closed circuit in a single building and you are not allowed to duplicate or alter the program for any purpose or distribute it over the internet etc.

FILM RESOURCES:

Blackbird Films (for screening *Witness to a Secret War*)
New York, NY
Deborah Dickson
dmdickson@gmail.com
info@witnessestoasecretwarthefilm.com

Collective Eye Films, Inc. (for screening *Between Two Worlds* and *Split Horn*)
Portland, OR
http://www.collectiveeye.org/products/between-two-worlds
orders@collectiveeye.org
503-232-5345

PBS 1-800-424-7963
http://www.pbs.org/about/faq/public-rights/screening/

Vander Films (for screening *Threads of Survival*)
Kathy Vander
Detroit, MI
vanderfilms@wowway.com
Programming Resources

The following individuals have been contacted on your behalf by Mid-America Arts Alliance (ExhibitsUSA) and have expressed an interest in receiving invitations from your organization to present a strong program inspired by the exhibition Cloth as Community: Hmong Textiles in America. In-region venues (AR, KS, MO, OK, NE, and TX) are eligible to receive a $1,000 ExhibitsUSA public programming grant. Please contact client relations at Mid-America for more information about applying for and receiving a programming grant to bring these nationally recognized speakers to your institution. Please discuss honoraria, travel fees, your program’s goal, and the timeframe for the potential engagement with each individual you plan to contact from this list of speakers for full consideration of your invitation to participate in your program.

Mary Louise Buley-Meissner, PhD
Associate Professor and co-author of Hmong and American: From Refugees to Citizens.
Department of English
University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee
P.O. Box 413
Milwaukee, WI 53201
meissner@uwm.edu
414-229-4533

TOPICS: Hmong American Studies, Asian American Literature, Spirituality Across Cultures

An enthusiastic advocate of cross-cultural education and travel, Mary Louise Buley-Meissner has enjoyed working with students in China, Japan and Germany and would like to work with students in Southeast Asia and India. At UWM, she has been involved in Hmong and Hmong American studies for fifteen years; her courses on Hmong American literature and life stories have been among the first in the US to integrate Hmong American studies into higher education. With Vincent K. Her, she is co-editing Choosing to Be Hmong and American: Re-envisioning Identity, Community and Culture in Modern Society, the first interdisciplinary essay collection to address contemporary Hmong American identity formation and cultural development.

Geraldine Craig
Curator of Cloth as Community: Hmong Textiles in America
Professor and Department Head
Department of Art
Kansas State University
111 Willard Hall
Manhattan, KS 66506
gk CRAIG@KSU.EDU
785-532-6605
TOPICS: Hmong textiles and dress

Geraldine Craig is an artist/writer whose research focuses on the intersections and relationships between textile history, theory/criticism, curatorial work and studio practice. Her writing is formed by modes of knowing as a maker, with primary research interests contemporary art/craft and Hmong textiles, generating knowledge of craft practices marginalized in Western art history canons. As Assistant Director for Academic Programs, Cranbrook Academy of Art (2001 – 2007), she developed the annual Critical Studies/Humanities program in response to these kinds of broad intersections/relationships seen in the MFA students’ studio production each year. Craig was the 2012-2013 Dorothy Liesky Wampler Eminent Professor, James Madison University, and in 2010 was elected an Associate Fellow at the International Quilt Study Center & Museum, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, NE. She was also awarded the 1994-95 James Renwick Senior Fellow in American Craft, Smithsonian Institution, and has presented at conferences throughout the United States, Brazil and Denmark. Craig has written a monograph on sculptor Joan Livingstone (Telos: London), and published over ninety book chapters, catalog essays, articles and reviews (Art in America, Hmong Studies Journal, The Journal of Modern Craft, Surface Design Journal, Sculpture, among others). Her studio work has been exhibited throughout the United States, Europe, and Mexico, and she has received numerous grants to support her research and creative practice, including the Michigan Council for Arts & Cultural Affairs Individual Creative Artist Grant. She has taught at Red Deer College, Alberta, Canada; College for Creative Studies, Detroit; the low-residency MFA, Vermont College. She has taught and been Department Head of Art at Kansas State University since July 2007.

Deborah Dickson
Film Producer, Director of Witness to a Secret War
dmdickson@gmail.com
info@witnessstoasecretwarthefilm.com
718-855-6762
646-773-9881

TOPICS: Can introduce her film and speak to making this documentary project about the history of the Vietnam War as related to the Hmong people.

Deborah Dickson, a three-time Academy Award nominee, is an independent documentary filmmaker who loves the mix of memory and cinéma vérité. A graduate of Barnard College/Columbia University and New York University Film School, Dickson is also known for her long collaboration with Susan Froemke and Maysles Films. In addition to Witness to a Secret War, Dickson has recently completed Another Day in Paradise, a documentary film about love and war, produced and filmed aboard an American aircraft carrier on a six-month deployment to the Persian Gulf. In startling verite intimacy, the film captures the camaraderie of military life, the bizarre psychology of modern warfare, and the difficulty of family life in the service.
Vincent K. Her, PhD  
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**TOPICS: Hmong culture in the mountains of Laos, Hmong participation in the wars of Southeast Asia, the Hmong escape from Laos, Hmong as refugees in Thailand and the West, the Hmong in contemporary society**

Dr. Paul Hillmer is a Professor of History and Director of the Hmong Oral History Project at Concordia University in St. Paul, MN. He began his work in the Hmong community informally as he was encouraging his Hmong American students to learn more about their families’ pasts through family interviews. More than a dozen years later the Hmong Oral History Project has collected over 225 interviews with Hmong from a wide variety of backgrounds, as well as Americans who knew them well in Laos, Thailand, and America. Hillmer was awarded a History Channel “Save Our History” grant in 2006 to create a documentary about Hmong resettlement in the Twin Cities, and authored *A People’s History of the Hmong* (2010).

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HMONG 101 PROGRAM
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TOPICS: Hmong history and culture, refugee resettlement experiences, community building, gender

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TOPICS: Hmong family history and diaspora

Kao Kalia Yang is the author of *The Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir*. The first Hmong-authored mainstream book from a literary press, the book garnered two Minnesota Book Awards in 2009. It is widely taught in elementary schools, high schools, colleges, and universities. It was selected as the common book for Macalester College, Hamline University, the University of Minnesota Twin Cities' College of Education and Human Development, the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire, California Lutheran University, and others. Yang has just finished her second book, *Still, Fluttering Heart: The Second Album*. She is a sought after teacher and public speaker.

Lee Pao Xiong
Director, Center for Hmong Studies
Lee Pao Xiong is currently the founding Director of the Center for Hmong Studies at Concordia University, St. Paul and professor of American Government/Political Science and Hmong Studies. He has served as the Director of Housing Policy and Development for the City of Minneapolis, President and CEO of The Urban Coalition, Executive Director of the State Council on Asian-Pacific Minnesotan, Hmong American Partnership and the Hmong Youth Association of Minnesota. Previously, he has also served on the staff of Minnesota State Senator Joe Bertram and United States Senator Carl Levin of Michigan in Washington, DC. In 2000, President William Jefferson Clinton appointed Lee Pao Xiong to serve on the President’s Advisory Commission on Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders to advise the president and federal agencies on issues relating to the 10 plus million Asian Americans in the United States, making him the first Hmong presidential appointee in the nation. Lee Pao Xiong is widely sought after as a speaker and trainer by many educational institutions, community organizations, as well as family groups to speak about Hmong history, culture, and society as well as on leadership and board governance related topics.

Programming Resources

Tap into YOUR local experts, scholars, and local or regional Hmong community to tailor programs for audiences you wish to attract and serve. Contact local groups whom you might wish to collaborate who might also serve as speakers. Potential sources for collaboration or for program design, audience development, or speaker outreach might include:

- University or local colleges (History, Anthropology, Southeast Asian studies, Art History departments)
- Area middle and high schools
- Senior centers
- Community centers
- Hmong Community or Cultural Centers (larger Hmong populations exist in Minnesota, California, North Carolina, and Wisconsin but your community might have a small Hmong population to engage)
- History Museums
• Art Museums or Art Centers
• Libraries
• Local media resources
• Hmong churches

Your state arts council, state humanities council, or regional arts organizations may be able to help you locate regional speakers who would be willing to be involved in a program or event at your museum.

• A list of state arts councils can be found at http://arts.endow.gov/partner/state/SAA_RAO_list.html, or call the National Endowment for the Arts at 202-682-5400.

• A list of state humanities councils can be found at http://www.neh.gov/whoweare/statecouncils.html, or call the National Endowment for the Humanities at 800-NEH (634)-1121.

• The U.S. Regional Arts Organizations represents six nonprofit entities created to encourage development of the arts and to support arts programs on a regular basis. Their web site is http://www.usregionalarts.org/ and lists all state arts agencies. You can also check your regional arts organization for information on its performing arts programs.

Educator Resources            Facts for Docents and Teachers

About the Hmong

The Hmong (pronounced mong and that translates as “free people”) are an ethnic group who have lived in the mountains of China since ancient times. The Chinese government wanted to change how the Hmong lived to fit into the Chinese majority culture and due to cultural clashes with the Chinese, some Hmong fled to Southeast Asia and eventually settled in the mountainous areas of Laos, Burma, Thailand and Vietnam. The Hmong cleared forestland to grow crops of rice, corn and other cash crops on the steep hillsides. During the Vietnam War (1960–75), some Hmong sided with the communist Vietnamese and others fought with the loyalist South Vietnam forces and were recruited to assist the U.S. Army Special Forces (Green Berets) as part of a special intelligence operation. Following the Vietnam War, many Hmong fled Vietnam in 1974 for Thailand to escape death threats, persecution, and violence by the Pathet Lao communist group. Since 1975, thousands of Hmong immigrated from Southeast Asia to the United States. In 2000, the Hmong population in the United States numbered 186,000. According to the 2010 United States Census, 260,076 Hmong Americans were living in the U.S. and the largest Hmong populations today in the U.S. are found in
California, Minnesota, Wisconsin, North Carolina, Michigan, Colorado, Georgia, Alaska, Oklahoma, and Oregon.

**About Paj Ntaub**

*Paj ntaub* (pronounced pan dow) in Hmong culture translates as flower cloth and is most frequently used to refer to Hmong clothing (jackets, skirts, turbans, and headdresses). *Paj ntaub* are created using a variety of techniques including batik, embroidery, appliqué, and cross-stitch (young Hmong girls are taught cross-stitch as part of traditional Hmong daily life). The Hmong are particularly known for their creative use of reverse appliqué in their textile designs. Varied Hmong clans incorporate different *paj ntaub* techniques and through the clothing designs it used to be possible to distinguish Hmong subgroups, but those distinctions have become less pronounced. Often, specific designs are used for particular cultural functions. Babies in traditional Hmong culture for example, might wear specially decorated hats to both protect their heads from weather and from evil spirits. A young Hmong woman traditionally might designate her availability for marriage or her status as a married woman through wearing particular designs. The dead (as part of funeral garb) wear particular *paj ntaub* designs on their funeral jackets or as part of burial gifts of cloth to assist their spirits in finding the right path (the way back to where you were born) in the afterlife.

Following the Hmong’s relocation to refugee camps in Thailand and Western countries, changes in the aesthetics and production of Hmong *paj ntaub* were significant. Between 1965 and 1975 missionaries in refugee camps encouraged Hmong women and men to make items to sell in western markets as a source of income. As a result of this encouragement, Hmong story cloths were created. Embroidered story cloths are not traditional to Hmong culture.

Since the 1970s, *Paj ntaub* that were once used to decorate skirts, pants, or jacket collars have been enlarged in style and these designs are now used by non-Hmong to decorate walls and furniture. The squares included in *Cloth as Community: Hmong Textiles in America* are not traditional to Hmong culture—they were started in the 1950s for the marketplace. Traditional color schemes for today’s *paj ntaub* are also often supplanted by colors that will attract American buyers.

Although there are a number of design elements that can typically be seen in *paj ntaub*, the ways in which they are combined are left up to the individual artists. Very rarely do the artists use standardized colors and designs. Several *paj ntaub* designs always have special significance however. For example, red and yellow lattice designs are found in burial trappings (coats, pillow, hats and jackets)—they are all decorated with these patterns and colors and are associated with funerals.
Making Paj Ntaub

There are three basic layers in creating paj ntaub, the overlay, the background, and the foundation. The overlay refers to the piece of fabric into which a design is cut (the cutting out of shapes to expose the bottom layer is the process for reverse appliqué). Reverse appliqué is a prevalent technique used in paj ntaub pieces. The design is actually the lower layer showing through the cut-out portions of the top layer of fabric—the overlay. The foundation layer provides stability to the piece. Appliqué stitches show on the foundation layer and create interesting patterns.

Each piece of contemporary paj ntaub begins with a piece of fabric, thread, and scissors. The fabric is always a solid color. Silk cloth and thread is still used for the traditional embroidered pieces when it is available, but cotton and cotton blend fabrics and thread are more frequently used in contemporary paj ntaub pieces. Two types of scissors are used: a small pair for cutting shapes of the fabric and a larger pair for cutting thread.

Traditionally, in making paj ntaub, patterns are not used, nor are designs planned ahead of time. A design develops from the way the fabric is folded and then cut. After completing four basic initial folds, the fabric is folded again in a variety of directions until all of the guidelines needed to cut the design are present. Often, the folds are traced over or marked with a straight pin to see and to give the lines permanence while creating the design. Once folded, the patterns are cut (much like one would cut the design of a paper snowflake).

There are six folds which are the foundation for all paj ntaub designs A square fold, center fold, a snail house fold, a star fold, an envelope fold, and a pinwheel fold. The folds become the guiding for the design and then the cutting of the design.

Varied patterns seen in Hmong textiles are often repeated and symbolize real life objects or animals—things found in the natural world that might be part Hmong folklife from Southeast Asia (see http://www.hmongembroidery.org/symbols.html for patterns frequently used in Hmong designs).

Educator Resources

Animist Philosophy—The belief that natural objects, natural phenomena, and the universe itself possess souls; the soul is the principle of life and health.

Appliqué—Ornamental needlework in which pieces of fabric are sewn or stuck onto a piece of fabric to form pictures or patterns. A cut-out design that is stitched to a background layer. The design itself is the appliqué.
**Apron**—A protective or decorative garment worn over the front of one’s clothes, either at the chest or waist level, and tied at the back.

**Baby Carrier**—A baby transporting and carrying garment used to hold an infant on the mother’s back.

**Basting**—The stitching that secures the three layers of *paj ntaub* together. Also referred to as foundation basting.

**Batik**—A method of resist dying in which melted wax is applied to a piece of cloth to create patterning and design. Where the wax is applied, the cloth resists dye. When the wax is removed, the design is revealed. In Asia, Hmong collected beeswax and indigo for making batik.

**Beliefs**—Something accepted as true by an individual or group.

**Blanket Stitch**—An overcast stitch sometimes used as a decorative edge on embroideries.

**Border**—The edge of a piece of cloth that has been turned under and sewn for decorative purposes.

**Channel**—The exposed section of background that forms the Paj Ntaub design.

**Clan**—A clan is a group of families or households, the heads of which claim descent from a common ancestor. There are 18 Hmong clans (Chang, Chue, Cheng, Fang, Her, Hang, Khang, Kong, Kee, Kue, Lor, Moua, Pha, Thao, Vang, Vue, Xlong, and Yang). In traditional Hmong society, women produced textiles as markers of clan identity.

**Closed Blanket Stitch**—A Blanket Stitch variation in which the vertical stitches are alternately angled to create triangles.

**Cross-stitch**—Needlework made with a double stitch to form an X.

**Culture**—The way of life shared by a group of people.

**Diaspora**—the spreading out and expansion of a people from an original central point of origin such as the Jews from Israel.

**Embroidery**—Ornamentation of fabric with needlework stitching.

**Funeral Coat**—A funeral coat or jacket is given to a Hmong person during his or her life. By the age of 50, most traditional members of the Hmong community have a set of
funeral clothing. Traditional Hmong funerary practices include burial in a special suit of clothes—a funeral coat is part of the dress.

Funeral Ritual—in Hmong tradition, when someone passes away, a funeral ritual is performed in order to make a safe passage for the soul to reach its ancestors. The ritual is traditionally a three-day ceremony in which the soul will be provided with food, water, money and clothing for the journey to the afterlife. Animals are sacrificed, music played on a bamboo pipe instrument (qeej) is played, and the deceased is buried in special funeral clothing and shoes of hemp.

Funeral Square (Noob Ncoos)—A square made specifically for the deceased. It represents the landscape of the ancestors in the afterlife.

Hemp—Cannabis plant grown for its fiber. Hmong people traditionally made cloth out of hemp.

Hemp Fiber—Paper, canvas, rope, or cloth made from hemp, a cannabis plant.

Hmong—A member of a people living traditionally in isolated mountain villages throughout Southern China and Southeast Asia, usually known as Miao in China.

Indigo—A tropical plant cultivated as a source of dark blue dye.

Miao—Hmong and related ethnic groups living traditionally in mountain villages in Southwestern China and the adjacent areas of Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand.

Mirrored Image—An image that has its parts arranged with a reversal of the right and left, as it would appear if seen in a mirror.

Motif—A decorative design or pattern.

Paj Ntaub—Any one of the needle art forms of Hmong folk art. Pronounced “pan dow,” the term translates as flower cloth. This term also refers to paj ntaub applique, a needle art form that combines geometric cutting, reverse appliqué and optional embellishment with embroidery or appliqué.

Qeej—A Hmong wind-blown reed instrument.

Quilt—A warm bed covering made of padding enclosed between layers of fabric and kept in place by lines of stitching.

Reverse Appliqué—A form of appliqué in which a design is cut out of the top layer of fabric, revealing an underlying background layer. The design is actually the lower layer showing through the cut-out portions of the top layer.
Shaman—Someone who is believed to be able to use special powers or spiritual practices to cure and heal people who are sick or control future events.

Shamanism—A form of religious practice in which a ritual specialist (the shaman) enters into a state of possessive trance in which he or she is believed to visit or communicate with the supernatural world to search out the cause of human affliction and heal or cure them.

Symmetry—The uniformity in size, shape, and relative position of design elements on opposite sides of a dividing line or around a center. Most paj ntaub squares reflect radial symmetry, in that the sides folded in half, in any direction, will create a mirror image.

Traditions—A system of beliefs, values, and practices passed down to people through the people who come before them.

Values—Principles or standards considered worthwhile or desirable.

Viet Minh—North Vietnamese communist movement.

Educator Resources  Topics for Gallery or Classroom Discussion

Topics for Gallery Discussion

Discussion Topic 1: Changes in Textile Style—Tradition vs. Cultural Transition?
The story cloth is not a traditional genre of Hmong paj ntaub textiles. Story cloths originated as an art form as a result of the Hmong refugee camps. The Hmong were encouraged by missionaries to create and sell needlework to westerners as a way to generate income. Compare and contrast various story cloth textiles in the exhibition (Jesus’ Birthday, Story Piece, Wedding Scene, Tiger Fable, Shaman, Animal Scene). Do you think the Hmong lose elements of their traditional culture by tailoring art forms to western tastes and/or to sell as a commodity? Why or why not? Would you prefer to purchase more traditional paj ntaub even if the intended function of this object isn’t something you would use at home based on your own religion, lifestyle, cultural beliefs, or family life, etc. (such as a baby carrier, funeral square, or funeral coat)? Why or why not? Do you think story cloths help or hurt traditional aspects of Hmong culture? In what ways? Do you think Hmong began to make story cloths to share Hmong culture in pictures? How is a picture or representational image different than a design motif?
Discussion Topic 2: Customs and Designs

Study the Wedding Scene story cloth featured in this exhibition. What do you think is happening here? What do you see that makes you say that?

The Hmong New Year’s Festival is often the beginning of intense courtship for young people to select and ‘woo’ potential life partners. After New Years, there are many weddings! In traditional Hmong culture, people wear their finest embroidered clothing as part of the New Year’s festival to show that the New Year will be a good and rich one. Men and women often pair off at the festival and toss soft cloth balls back and forth to each other. Anyone who drops a ball must forfeit a gift (to be returned later) or sing a folk song. Following the New Year’s festival celebrations, many couples get married. The parents of the bride host a wedding feast to celebrate the announcement of the marriage and animals are sacrificed for the feast (usually a pig). After the wedding, when a traditional Hmong bride enters the groom’s house for the first time, a rooster is waved over her to symbolize that she is now a member of the groom’s household.

Compare this depicted Hmong wedding custom illustrated in this story cloth to that of other cultures or traditions you might be familiar with. Research the following for discussion: Why do brides and grooms typically exchange rings? Why is there a wedding cake? Why does a bride wear a veil? Why does the groom carry the bride over the threshold on the wedding night? What is the historical purpose of the honeymoon? What other cultural traditions and customs you are familiar with?

Discussion Topic 3: Hmong Designs

In the arts of the Hmong, stylized designs often are abstracted from nature. Although different Hmong groups might have different interpretations for particular designs, many are derived from animal forms or things in the natural world. Stylized animal tracks for example can be considered spirit imprints of the person or animal who has passed by. Elephants are respected for their strength. Some Hmong say that elephants lead dead spirits to the otherworld. Spiders were not removed from homes in traditional Hmong culture. Their webs were used medicinally. Triangle shapes are used to represent teeth, fish scales, dragon scales, fences, mountains or protective barriers to keep good spirits in and evil spirits out. Use the Gallery Guide to Hmong Designs handout (downloadable on the EUSA resources website to be included if desired as part of the exhibition) and look carefully at works in the exhibition (or study Purple and Green, Cross Stitch, and Elephant’s Foot as projected digital images in the classroom).

What references to the natural world do you see in these works? What do you think some of the patterns might mean? How are some of these designs interpreted or used by the Hmong? What designs are you familiar with as part of your everyday life? Why? What do they mean?
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**Educator Resources**

**Common Core Lesson Idea**

**Fabricating Fables: Hmong Storytelling and Folktales**

**Write and Illustrate your Own Fable**

**Grade Levels 6-8 (can be adapted for high school level)**

**Summary**

This lesson incorporates content from the exhibition *Cloth as Community: Hmong Textiles in America* to inspire students to consider familiar folktales and fables from their own personal experience and childhood to contrast with those of Hmong culture. As part of this activity, students will visually ‘read’ the Hmong story cloth *Tiger Fable* and listen to the written fable text read aloud as part of a class discussion (or read the printed fable on his or her own included as part of this lesson). Students can then discuss a familiar Aesop’s fable such as the *Fox and the Crow* (also included as part of this lesson) to compare with several Hmong folktales published in *Folk Stories of the Hmong* (a book that travels with the *Cloth as Community: Hmong Textiles in America* exhibition). Students can review the structure and elements of story, define a fable or folktale, study the visual elements and design features of a Hmong storycloth, and then write and illustrate their own fable using *Story Piece (Birds, Monkeys, and Tigers)* as visual inspiration.

**Objectives**

- Students will compare and contrast familiar folktales and fables with folktales of the Hmong.
- Students will understand that fables communicate moralistic values.
- Students will understand the structural elements of a story.
- Students will examine Hmong storycloths and understand their history and function and aesthetic design.
- Students will write a fable using their imaginations.
- Students can illustrate the sequence of the fable using a storyboard format, colored pencils, markers and crayons.

**Materials Needed**
• Access to *Cloth as Community: Hmong Textiles in America* exhibition.
• Digital images of *Story Piece (Birds, Monkeys, and Tigers)* and *Tiger Fable* from *Cloth as Community: Hmong Textiles in America*.
• Copies of printed Hmong folktales extracted from the text *Folk Stories of the Hmong: Peoples of Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam*.
• Copies of printed Aesop’s fables for comparison.
• Pencils, markers, or colored pencils for writing and illustration (other media such as markers, crayons, or gouache paint can be use to create the storyboard)
• Large sheets of drawing paper, watercolor paper, or illustration board (18 x 20 inches or whatever size is desired) for creating a finished drawing or painting.
• rulers
• Ruled paper or access to a computer and Microsoft Word application are required for drafting, editing, and writing the final version of the fable.

**Lesson Time**

• One class period to visit the exhibition.
• One class period to contextualize the Hmong as an ethnic group, discuss aspects of Hmong culture (including the reading of Hmong folktales), compare Hmong folktales to familiar ones (such as Aesop’s fables) and visually compare and contrast storycloth works from the *Cloth as Community: Hmong Textiles in America* exhibition.
• One-two class periods (if desired as an in-class assignment) for students to write and illustrate his or her own fables.

**Lesson Procedures**

**Step One (Hmong context)**

**Hmong storytelling.**
In Laos, the Hmong told stories at night before bedtime. Originally, the Hmong told their stories in rhymed verse. Most folktales have a moral to the story or an additional meaning. Listeners to a Hmong folktale are supposed to consider the deeper meaning to the story. Listen to this Hmong folktale (while viewing the story cloth *Tiger Fable*) and discuss what might be the deeper message—the moral of the story.

**Hmong Folk Tale: The Woman and the Tiger**

Many years ago a man went hunting and killed a monkey. But a tiger was watching and waiting.
The tiger killed the man and ate him.
Then he put on the man’s clothes, took the man’s gun, and went to the man’s house.
The wife of the man didn’t know it was a tiger, but her younger sister said, “That’s not your husband.”

That night, the tiger ate the wife and all the children. The younger sister Yer was up in the attic. She heard crunch, crunch, like the breaking of bones, and she was scared. She called down, “What are you doing?” The tiger answered, “Oh nothing, just chewing some plant stems with rice water.”

The next morning, the tiger said, “Come down,” but Yer was afraid and she wouldn’t come down. The tiger said, “You come down or I’ll come up.”

So Yer gave him some corn and sent a message to her family. “A tiger came and ate everybody but me. I climbed up the ladder and I am safe. Come quickly!”

Then the tiger came back from the river. Yer threw ashes and salt and pepper in his eyes. And he went back to the river again.

Yer’s family came.

“Where’s the tiger?” they asked.

“He’s down at the river,” answered Yer. “I’ll call him.”

“Tiger, Tiger!” Yer called. “My family is here. They will give me to you. I will be your wife.”

“Aha! Good!” the tiger answered. “I’m coming right now.” So the tiger came to the house. He was quiet.

Yer’s sister said, “All right tiger, let’s talk.” “All right,” the tiger said. “You go first.” “No, brother-in-law tiger, you go first.”

So the tiger began. “Lo-law, sister-in-law, you’ll be caught in the teeth of my jaw—heh heh!” “Now it is your turn sister-in-law.”

“Brother-in-law tiger, save your labor, you’ll be cut with spear and saber.”

But the tiger started again, “Lo-law sister-in-law you’ll be caught in the teeth of my jaw.”

While they were talking, some of the family went outside. They dug a hole in the path between the house and the river. They covered the hole with small branches and leaves. They said, “brother-in-law tiger, your eyes are hurting. Close them. We will lead you. We’ll show you where to walk. You walk between us.”

So they led the tiger down the path. He stepped on the small branches and leaves. He fell into the hole and the brothers cut him up!

Then they took Yer home with them.

For Discussion:

What do you think is the message or moral of The Woman and the Tiger Hmong folktale (what do you think it means?)

Do you think the story cloth Tiger Fable illustrates this story well? Why or why not?

Compare the written (oral story) to that depicted in the work Tiger Fable in Cloth as Community: Hmong Textiles in America. Does the embroidered story cloth describe the story you heard or read in the same fashion? What part of the cloth are most appealing to you visually? Why?
Step Two (Story Structure and Fabrication)

Consider other fables (short stories usually about an animal that are intended to teach us a lesson) and folktales you know (use Aesop’s Fox and Crow if desired) for comparison.

Aesop’s Fable

*The Fox and the Crow*

A Fox once saw a Crow fly off with a piece of cheese in its beak and settle on a branch of a tree.

"That's for me, as I am a Fox," said Master Reynard, and he walked up to the foot of the tree.

"Good day, Mistress Crow," he cried. "How well you are looking today: how glossy your feathers; how bright your eye. I feel sure your voice must surpass that of other birds, just as your figure does; let me hear but one song from you that I may greet you as the Queen of Birds."

The Crow lifted up her head and began to caw her best, but the moment she opened her mouth the piece of cheese fell to the ground, only to be snapped up by Master Fox.

"That will do," said he. "That was all I wanted. In exchange for your cheese I will give you a piece of advice for the future: "Do not trust flatterers."

Are the messages clear in both stories? In what ways do they suggest, inspire, or help you to become a better person? What values do they teach? Which one of these two stories is your favorite and why?

Discuss the elements of a written story: character, plot, description, dialogue, theme, motivation, conflict, resolution, conclusion and dissect each element of the story using one of the Hmong folktale or Aesop’s fable examples.

Step Three (Examine and write)

Craft your own fable using the Story Piece featured in *Cloth as Community: Hmong Textiles in America* as inspiration for writing. Study the work Story Piece and discuss as a class some of the visual elements present in the work.

What do you notice? What do you see that makes you say that? Do you think this artist was interested in scale? Why or why not?
Consider the Hmong as a culture and as artists—there is no painting or drawing artistic practice in traditional Hmong culture. Their artistry and visual skill is exemplified through stitching. How and why did the Hmong begin making story cloths? What do you think inspired them? What influenced them visually and how do you suspect some of the makers’ aesthetic choices were made/decided?

Before writing, instruct students to incorporate in their imagined fable the animals featured in the Story Piece image. Invite students to consider the featured animal’s physical and behavioral characteristics and habitats etc. as a way to demonstrate or teach others something important about life (or instill a value). It might be helpful to think about the outcome or moral (message) that each student wishes to convey through the written work first, then design characters to support this outcome.

Encourage students to use their imaginations and think of a linear progression to design their fables. Imagine that The Story Piece is only one frozen moment in time for the fable they will create. Is this image at the start of the fable, in the middle, or at the end? Encourage students to incorporate all aspects of the visual image into their written work.

Step Four (Draw and Design)

Have students divide aspects of the folk tale (for the purpose of illustrating it) into six story parts that will be illustrated in six boxes. Using a ruler and pencil, divide the illustration board or sheet of paper into six components. Then, lightly sketch the sequence of events to begin illustrating the action of the story. Use other media (colored pencils, paint, markers) to finish the artwork. See if students can design their storyboards to illustrate the action of the story without incorporating much text.

Step Five (Share and Discuss)

Invite students to share their written work and illustrations with each other as part of class to compare and contrast the varied moral messages, creative stories inspired by the same image and storyboard sequences.

Resources

See Glossary in the Educator Resources section in this programming guide for definitions of terms.

See Web Resources in the Exhibition Resources section in this programming guide for additional helpful websites.

Use the texts that travel with the exhibition for Hmong history and context.
Connections to Common Core Standards
(grade 8 example)
English Language Arts Standards
(with inserted adaptations in parentheses for assisting visual art teachers in
demonstrating and making connections to the common core and visual art)

Reading Standards for Literature (Reading a Work of Art)
Key Ideas and Details
• Cite the textual (visual) evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what
  the text (work of art) says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text
  (work of art).
• Determine a theme or central idea of a text (a work of art) and analyze its
development to the characters, setting, and plot, provide an objective summary
of the text (work of art).
• Analyze how particular lines (visual elements convey) of dialogue or incidents in a
  story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a
decision.

Craft and Structure
• Determine the meaning of words and phrases (images) as they are used in a text
  (work of art), including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact
  of specific word (visual elements) choices on meaning and tone including
  analogies or allusions to other texts (works of art).
• Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts (works of art) and
  analyze how the differing structure of each text (artwork) contributes to its
  meaning and style.
• Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience
  or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as
  suspense or humor.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
• Analyze the extent to which a filmed or live production of a story or drama stays
  faithful to or departs from the text or script, evaluating the choices made by the
director or actors.
• Analyze how a modern work of fiction draws on themes, patterns of events, or
  character types from myths, traditional stories, or religious works such as the
  Bible, including describing how the material is rendered new.

Writing Standards (Design)
Text Types and Purposes
• Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.
• Write (design) informative/explanatory texts (artwork) to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts and information through careful selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
• Write (sketch) narratives to develop relate or imagined experiences or events using effective techniques, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
• Produce clear and coherent writing (visual compositions) in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.
• Conduct short research projects to answer a question drawing on several sources and generating additional related or focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.
• Draw evidence from literary or informational texts (other works of art or visual sources) to support analysis, reflection and research.

Speaking and Listening Standards
• Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Language Standards—Conventions of Standard English
• Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
• Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
• Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies

Key Ideas and Details
• Cite specific textual (analyze elements depicted in an artwork) evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
• Identify key steps in a text’s description (in the creation of the work of art) of a process related to history social studies.

Craft and Structure
• Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.
• Describe how a text presents information (sequentially, comparatively, casually).
• Identify aspects of a text (of the work of art) that reveal an author’s point of view or purpose.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
• Integrate visual information with other information in print and digital texts.
• Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text (*expressed in the work of art*)

**Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies**

**Text Types and Purposes**

• Write arguments (*Craft a point of view*) focused on discipline-specific content (introduce a claim about a topic, support claim with logical reasoning, etc.).
• Write (*Design*) informative and explanatory texts (*artwork*) including the narration of historical events.
• Produce clear and coherent writing (*visual narrative or depiction*) in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**Educator Resources**

Hmong Design Gallery Activity
These design motifs are often found on many types of paj ntaub (pronounced pan dow) or flower cloths. Different Hmong groups have varied interpretations for these designs. Here are some typical designs and related information for understanding Hmong textile patterns.

**Centipedes**
Centipedes are known for their medicinal qualities and are highly respected in Hmong culture. The centipede (repeated zig-zag motif) is often used in borders on textiles.

**Chicken Foot** (chicken eye or tail)
These elements might symbolize family prosperity, respect, and honor toward ancestors.

**Diamonds / Triangles**
A diamond in a square can represent the altar maintained in the home, mountains, the imprint of the most powerful good spirit, or the floor plan of a Buddhist pagoda. Triangles are used to represent teeth, fish scales, dragon scales, fences, mountains, or are included in designs as protective barriers to keep evil spirits out.

**Elephant Foot**
Elephants are respected for their strength, and the Hmong avoid saying anything to hurt elephants lest they come and damage a family’s property. Some Hmong say that elephants lead dead spirits to the otherworld.

**Heart**
A heart pattern symbolizes protection and affection.

**House**
A Hmong traditional house is built so that a distant mountain can be seen from either the front or the back door. Before building a home, the Hmong dig a hole a few inches in diameter and place as many grains of rice in it as there are people in the family. If the spirits move the grains of rice in the night, another site must be chosen. Except in the lowlands, all houses are built with wood and bamboo, thatch roofs, dirt floors, and no windows.

**Maze**
A dream maze is a pattern of right-angle appliqués. Legend has it that a Hmong woman awoke from a dream to cut out this new and different pattern. This design also includes an ancient universal symbol known as the “happiness for all symbol” which was originally a symbol of peace, love, and happiness (this symbol was altered by the Nazi party in Germany and adopted by the party in 1935).

**Pumpkin and Cucumber Seeds**
Seeds symbolize fertility and good fortune. The pumpkin seed together with a snail pattern is often used on children’s hats. It is thought that young souls tend to wander and Hmong patterns could hold a child’s soul in its body until it is used to being in a new environment.

**Snail**
Snails are a symbol of family growth and interrelatedness. The center of the snail shell symbolizes the ancestors. The outer spirals are the successive generations and the double snail shell represents the union of two families as well as the spinning motion used in many spiritual chants.

**Star / Spider Web**
The eight-pointed star indicates good luck and is a protective symbol. Spiders are not removed from the home. Their webs are used medicinally.

(Design interpretation from www.HmongEmbroidery.org, pp. 78-87 of Teaching with Folk Stories of the Hmong, and pp. 11-12 of Folk Stories of the Hmong. Diagram from pp. 70-71 Michigan Hmong Arts: Textiles In Transition)
Use the Cloth as Community: Hmong Textiles in America works on view as inspiration to design an abstract pattern influenced by Hmong designs or sketch your favorite design from the exhibition here: