

**CHAZEN MUSEUM OF ART**  
University of Wisconsin–Madison  
800 University Avenue  
Madison, WI 53706  
www.chazen.wisc.edu

**PRESS RELEASE**  
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Contact: Susan Day  
(608) 263-2068, sday@chazen.wisc.edu

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## **Major Exhibition of Chinese Minority Textiles Comes to the Chazen**

*Writing with Thread: Traditional Textiles of Southwest Chinese Minorities* offers a visual feast of exquisite and rare costumes and jewelry from fifteen ethnic groups and nearly one hundred subgroups living in southwest China. These five hundred splendidly woven and embroidered textiles and costume pieces represent work of the finest quality and historic significance. Three galleries will showcase entire ensembles of adults' and children's regalia, baby carriers, quilt covers, and silver ornaments, as well as a loom, weaving tools, and embroidery cases. The exhibition will be on view January 31 to April 12, 2009. An opening reception will be held Friday, January 30, from 7–8:30 p.m.

Southwest China is a region of rich river systems and complex topography, inhabited by thirty-one of the country's fifty-six ethnic groups. *Writing with Thread: Traditional Textiles of Southwest Chinese Minorities* showcases the superb, detailed craftsmanship from ethnic groups including the Jingpo, Maonan, Miao (Hmong), Yi, Dong, Tujia, Shui, Zhuang, Dai, Buyi, Yao, and Zang. The exhibition explores the cultural messages associated with the production and use of indigenous clothing. In societies without written languages, traditions and customs are passed orally from generation to generation. The textile arts, largely practiced by women, also provide tangible evidence of a group's history, myths, and legends. The signs and patterns woven or embroidered in their clothing are often replicated in the accompanying silver ornaments made by men. The textiles and silver ornaments complement a group's oral traditions, recording and transmitting ideas and concepts that preserve the identities of their makers and users, and even reconstruct them for those who have lost touch. The needlework and silverwork of each ethnic group reveal variations in origin myths, heroic combats, communal memories, and wish fulfillment.

Textile scholar Angela Sheng, from McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, is principal curator of the exhibition. The objects have been selected from the collection of southwest Chinese textiles owned by Huang Ying-feng, an independent scholar and collector and director of the Evergrand Museum in Taoyuan, Taiwan. Both will visit the Chazen and give public talks related to the exhibition. Japanese scholar Tomoko Torimaru, who specializes in the history and technology of traditional Chinese Minority textiles, will also come to the Chazen to give a two-part lecture on Miao (Hmong) textile work.

*Writing with Thread* opened at the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa Art Gallery, and after it closes at the Chazen Museum of Art it will travel to the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and return to Taiwan for an exhibition in Taipei.

The exhibition was organized by the University of Hawai‘i Art Gallery and the Evergrand Art Museum, Taoyuan, Taiwan, and is supported by the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate Education, John Young Foundation, Blakemore Foundation, Hawai‘i State Foundation on Culture and the Arts through appropriations from the Legislature of the State of Hawai‘i and the National Endowment for the Arts, Joseph and Vera Zilber Family Foundation, University of Hawai‘i at Manoa Center for Chinese Studies/Confucius Institute, Carolyn and Warren Luke, Blodwyn Goo Endowment, University of Hawai‘i Women’s Campus Club, Gulab and Indru Watumull Grant for Museum Studies in the Arts, Commercial Data Systems, Wing Tek Lum and Chee Ping Lee Lum, and private contributions.

Generous local support for this exhibition has been provided by the Chazen Museum of Art Council, Hilldale Fund, The Great Dane Pub & Brewing Co., UW Health, Group Health Cooperative, Executive Management, Inc., Taste of Asia, and Wisconsin Arts Board with funds from the State of Wisconsin and the National Endowment for the Arts.

### Events

- **Thursday January 29, 5:30 p.m.** Lecture by Huang Ying-feng, independent scholar and collector of Chinese minority costumes, Director of the Evergrand Museum in Taoyuan, Taiwan, and curatorial advisor for *Writing with Thread*. *Huang introduces the ethnic minorities represented in the exhibition, then discusses collecting, documenting and classifying pieces, and traveling and interviewing the artisans.*
- **OPENING RECEPTION AND CURATOR LECTURE**
  - Friday January 30, 6 p.m.** Curator Lecture: “*Writing with Thread: Idea to Implementation*,” by Angela Sheng, professor of Chinese Art History, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.
  - 7 p.m.** Opening reception with Madison’s Hmong Keng Players and Hmong Sisters dance group, refreshments, and a cash bar.
- **Saturday January 31, 1:30 p.m.** Textiles curator Angela Sheng and collector Huang Ying-feng will conduct a gallery walk of *Writing with Thread*.
- **Sunday, February 1, 2 p.m.** Thomas Klobe, director emeritus of the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa Art Gallery, will conduct a gallery walk of *Writing with Thread*.
- **MARION STEMMLER MEMORIAL LECTURES**
  - Japanese scholar Tomoko Torimaru, a specialist in the history and technology of traditional Chinese minority textiles, will deliver two lectures about Miao (Hmong) textiles, discussing materials, stitches, garment construction, symbols, and cultural history. These lectures are presented in honor of Marion Stemmler, an award-winning embroiderer and Chazen Museum of Art docent from 1984 to 2008. They were made possible by generous gifts from her friends and family.
  - Thursday February 19, 5:30 p.m.** “Environment and Material Culture: Textiles and Costumes of the Miao (Hmong) People in Guizhou, China.” *Ms. Torimaru will discuss the costumes, symbolism, and everyday use, as well as how materials are made.*
  - Sunday February 22, 2 p.m.** “One Needle, One Thread: Miao (Hmong) Embroidery and Fabric Piecework from Guizhou, China.” *Ms. Torimaru will discuss embroidery,*

*piecework, garment construction, and costume symbols. Session includes an illustrated lecture, a hands-on examination of textiles from private research collections, and an exhibition tour.*

- **FAMILY DAY—*Tradition and Technique: A Celebration of Hmong Culture***  
**Saturday, March 28, 12–4 p.m.** The Chazen presents a family day in conjunction with *Writing with Thread*. Celebrate Miao (Hmong) culture with music, hands-on activity, and guided tours of the exhibition. Details to follow. Children under 12 should be accompanied by an adult.
- **Sunday, March 29, 2:30 p.m.** Gallery tour with Mary Ann Fitzgerald, Chazen Exhibition Coordinator. *Mary Ann Fitzgerald has a specialty in textiles and has traveled among the ethnic groups whose costumes are represented in the exhibition. She will lead a tour and discuss representative examples.*
- **Weekends, February 7 through exhibition closing, 12:30–4:45 p.m.** Docents-on-Duty. Chazen docents will be available in *Writing with Thread* to answer questions and present mini-tours.

# # #

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January 22, 2009

Contact: Susan Day  
(608) 263-2068, sday@chazen.wisc.edu

Mary Carr Lee  
(608) 263-2495, mcarrlee@chazen.wisc.edu

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**Needle and Thread:  
Finely Crafted Textiles Tell Stories of Southwest Chinese Minorities**

*Writing with Thread: Traditional Textiles of Southwest Chinese Minorities* opens at the Chazen January 31, 2009, and offers a visual feast of exquisitely designed costumes from southwest China, a region of rich river systems and complex topography that is inhabited by thirty-one of the country's fifty-six minority ethnic groups. The five hundred examples of rare and historically significant clothing, jewelry, and silver ornaments, created by fifteen ethnic groups and nearly one hundred subgroups, are being shown in the continental United States for the first time. "*Writing with Thread* represents one of the most outstanding collections of southwest Chinese minority costumes in the world, and the best to ever be presented in the United States. We are lucky to have it in Wisconsin," says Tom Klobe, director emeritus of the University of Hawai'i at Manoa Art Gallery.

The exhibition showcases the superb techniques, designs, and craftsmanship of fifteen minority groups including the Jingpo, Maonan, Miao (Hmong), Yi, Dong, Tujia, Shui, Zhuang, Dai, Buyi, Yao, Hani, Gelao, Li, and Zang. Entire ensembles of women's, men's and children's regalia, baby carriers, quilt covers, festive and religious vestments, silver jewelry, embroidered silk valences, and wax-resist dyed curtains will be on view, as well as a loom, weaving tools, and embroidery cases.

*Writing with Thread* explores the cultural messages associated with the production and use of indigenous clothing. In societies without written languages, traditions and customs are passed orally from generation to generation. The textiles and silver ornaments complement a group's oral traditions, recording and transmitting ideas and concepts of ethnic identity, revealing variations in origin myths, heroic combats, communal memories, and wish fulfillment.

The craftsmanship and costumes also serve important social functions. According to Klobe, many are worn for festivals. Miao courting costumes, in particular, represent the pinnacle of needlecraft. Girls learn to embroider from the age of 4 or 5, and take part

in courting rituals at around age 13. The quality of their embroidery is more important to gaining a husband than is their beauty. The amount of silver on the costume displays the family's wealth and is also important. Yet the remote villages are feeling the influence of the modern world and values are changing. Young women would rather get an education than learn embroidery. The Miao still value their textile designs, but production is changing from individually handmade one-of-a-kind pieces to mass or mechanically produced textiles and jewelry.

Most of the costumes in this exhibition are from the late-nineteenth through mid-twentieth centuries. As the world changes, so do art forms, and opportunities to see work of this quality are rare. Russell Panczenko, director of the Chazen Museum of Art, says this is exactly why museums are important. Cultures and values change, but exquisitely created objects can be preserved for future generations to see. They can be a window on a time, place, and culture that has changed or even vanished.

In the decades following the Vietnam War, the Hmong of Laos have settled in the United States as refugees, many in Wisconsin and Minnesota, bringing traditions of needlecraft and storytelling with them. "Although they are refugees from a remote region, community awareness has grown as people study Hmong culture and history. *Writing with Thread* will enhance Hmong cultural understanding and help shape self-identity."—Mai Zong Vue, Hmong storyteller, restaurateur, and local community leader.

Media opportunities: Thomas Klobe, director emeritus of the University of Hawai'i at Manoa Art Gallery and organizer of the exhibition, and Angela Sheng, principal curator and textile scholar from McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, are available for interviews.

*Writing with Thread: Traditional Textiles of Southwest Chinese Minorities* was organized by the University of Hawai'i Art Gallery and the Evergrand Art Museum, Taoyuan, Taiwan and is supported by the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate Education, John Young Foundation, Blakemore Foundation, Hawai'i State Foundation on Culture and the Arts through appropriations from the Legislature of the State of Hawai'i and the National Endowment for the Arts, Joseph and Vera Zilber Family Foundation, University of Hawai'i at Manoa Center for Chinese Studies/Confucius Institute, Carolyn and Warren Luke, Blodwyn Goo Endowment, University of Hawai'i Women's Campus Club, Gulab and Indru Watumull Grant for Museum Studies in the Arts, Commercial Data Systems, Wing Tek Lum and Chee Ping Lee Lum, and private contributions.

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**FAMILY DAY—*Tradition and Technique: A Celebration of Hmong Culture***

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Contact: Susan Day  
(608) 263-2068, sday@chazen.wisc.edu

Mary Carr Lee  
(608) 263-2495, mcarrlee@chazen.wisc.edu

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### **Chazen Hosts Family Day for *Writing with Thread* Exhibition**

In conjunction with the textile exhibition *Writing with Thread: Traditional Textiles of Southwest Chinese Minorities*, the Chazen Museum of Art will present an afternoon of music, hands-on activities, performances, and guided tours that celebrate Wisconsin's Hmong culture. *Tradition and Technique: A Celebration of Hmong Culture* will be held on Saturday, March 28, from 12–4 p.m. Free admission. Children under 12 should be accompanied by an adult. Performers include:

- Music by Dang Yang (Milwaukee) on qeej, bamboo flutes, jaw harps, and the two-string violin
- Demonstration by Vanchai Xiong (Sheboygan), jeweler and blacksmith
- Hands-on embroidery demonstration by women from Kajsia House (Madison)
- Storytelling by Mai Zong Vue (Madison), folksinger, storyteller
- Songs by Amy Vue (Milwaukee)
- Guided tours by Chazen docents

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