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NEWS RELEASE

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ASIAN EXHIBITS OPEN AT MONTANA MUSEUM OF ART & CULTURE

MISSOULA—

Two exhibitions that feature ceramic artworks and a collection of Southeast Asian textiles will open Friday, Sept. 5, at the Montana Museum of Art & Culture, located in the Performing Arts and Radio/Television Center at The University of Montana.

“Weaving Cultures...Highlights of the Helen Cappadocia Collection of Southeast Asian Textiles” will be on view in the museum’s Meloy Gallery. A collection of ceramic artworks by Steven Young Lee titled “notions...” will be in the museum’s Paxson Gallery. The exhibitions will be at the museum through Saturday, Oct. 25.

The textiles in “Weaving Cultures...” – 74 pieces out of the more than 600 comprising the Helen Cappadocia Collection – range from historical pieces to traditional and contemporary works.

The textiles are exhibited in two groups. One focuses on pieces produced by the various Thai Lao groups who lived in Northern Laos, Thailand and China in the late 19th and 20th centuries. The other focuses on contemporary textiles created by Hmong refugees living in Thailand and the United States and more traditional pieces, many of which were made in Laos and date back to the first half of the 19th and 20th centuries. The exhibition includes textiles created by Hmong communities in Missoula.

The people of Laos, including today's Hmong ancestors, originally came from China and were forced to migrate south by the Chinese. For the past 1,000 years, they have experienced conflict with the Vietnamese, Siamese, Chinese, French, Japanese and Americans. Their materials reflect both the hardship of their lives and the durability of their cultures.

The majority of the textiles in the exhibition were never intended to be presented in the context of an art gallery. Most of the hand-stitched and woven fabrics, which have survived relatively intact, were made to serve specific and practical functions in domestic and religious life. But such utility has not inhibited the creation of beautiful and exquisitely complex objects that demonstrate the establishment of sophisticated aesthetic traditions which have stood the test of time.

Fashioned into costumes, collars, skirts, money vests, story cloths, blankets and prayer shawls, the textiles have been used to identify and honor family members, language groups and spiritual forces.

The museum's exhibition "notions..." features a selection of ceramic artworks by Lee, who is the resident artist director at the Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts in **Helena**.

"The objects I create often refer to the form, decoration, color and materials of historical ceramics, yet ask viewers to confront their contemporary context," Lee said. "These parallels can exist in my work through decorative motifs or traditional visual surfaces on forms of various origins."

Lee demonstrates his fascination with the ancient and the contemporary in pieces such as "Blue and White Jar," where he uses a historic, porcelain vessel form and glazing technique to create a traditional Eastern landscape painting, then infuses it with a contemporary

reference, the Smurf characters.

“My work investigates the process of recognition – how as individuals we draw realities based on experiences and environment,” Lee said. “I enjoy examining various cultural systems to question what is inherent and what is learned.”

Lee, a Chicago native, received a Master of Fine Arts in Ceramics from the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University in 2004. During 2004-05, he lectured and taught at numerous universities throughout China.

In the United States, he has taught at Interlochen Center for the Arts in Michigan, the Clay Art Center in New York and the Lillstreet Art Center in Chicago. His work has been exhibited in China, Canada and throughout the United States and is held in private collections in New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois and Montana.

Three events in conjunction with the exhibitions will be held at the museum’s Meloy Gallery. They are free and open to the public.

Lee will give an artist talk at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 9.

A panel discussion titled “Hmong Culture – Conversation and Context” will be held at 7 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 9. Panelists include anthropologist Suzanne Bessac, UM anthropology Professor G.G. Weix and a representative from the Hmong community.

At 7 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 23, the museum will present “A Conversation with the Collector: Helen Cappadocia.”

MMAC hours are 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday and 4 to 8:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. There is no charge for admission, and free parking is available near the northwest corner of the PAR/TV Center.

For more information, call 406-243-2019 or go to the museum's Web site at

<http://www.umt.edu/montanamuseum>.

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NOTE TO MEDIA: Digital images of selected artworks included in these exhibitions are available by request. Call Becky Garner, MMAC coordinator of programs and publications, at 406-243-2019 or e-mail rebecca.garner@mso.umt.edu.

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