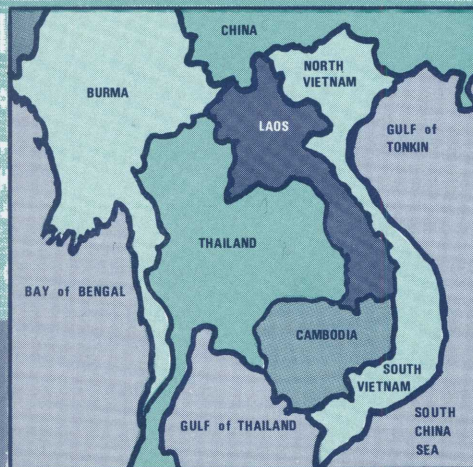


The Project

Metropolitan Arts Commission • 1120 SW Fifth • Room 518 • Portland • Oregon • 97204
Oregon School of Arts and Crafts • 8245 SW Barnes Road • Portland • Oregon • 97225



In the spring of 1982 the Portland Metropolitan Arts Commission and the National Endowment for the Arts funded a project for Lao weavers sponsored by the Oregon School of Arts and Crafts and coordinated by Kham One Keopraseuth, a Lao community liaison who sees his role as bridging the gap between Lao artists and mainstream American culture. The goal of this project is both to educate the host community to weaving in Lao culture and to help the Lao community itself in maintaining its cultural traditions. Specifically the project made it possible for two Lao weavers to practice their craft and to share their skills with others. This brochure seeks to show some of the wealth of artistic tradition that the Lao community has brought to Portland.

In Portland today the Lao community is attempting to find its place in a new culture without losing vital connections with their traditional culture—their roots. The practice and appreciation of Lao art can become a living bridge between the two cultures. In practical terms, weaving can bring in extra income, but it can also be a means towards reviving a mutual support network within the community. These special skills are a common bond among the Lao and in sharing them they can make new bonds with others.



The Arts of Laos:

Silk Weaving



The Tradition of Lao Weaving

Weaving in Laos is first and foremost the traditional, structured craft of women creating clothing for their families. But Lao weaving is also a well developed form of art that goes beyond this purely practical female occupation. Through the discipline of her craft the Lao weaver finds artistic expression and becomes a creative member of her community. Weaving is a highly respected skill in Laos and handwoven garments are both prized by their owners and well appreciated by all who see them.

From earliest childhood a young girl helps her elders with the various tasks involved in weaving. Cotton and mulberry (for the culture of silkworms) are grown throughout Laos and children help in planting and harvesting. A young girl might learn first to spin cotton fibers into yarn and then to dye her yarn and weave it into simple cloth. Later, as she becomes more adept at handling the fine yarns, she will learn the process of *mat-mee* on silk thread. She must learn the wrapping and dyeing techniques, cutting off the wrappings without cutting the thread and the weaving of the patterned threads into a fine silk fabric of delicate geometric design. And, in addition to this type of fabric there are the skills of weft brocade to be mastered using a loom equipped with a complex system of pattern sticks and the designs to be woven with fine metallic threads. It is no wonder that often the Lao girl will listen to the songs of her suitors while sitting at her loom.

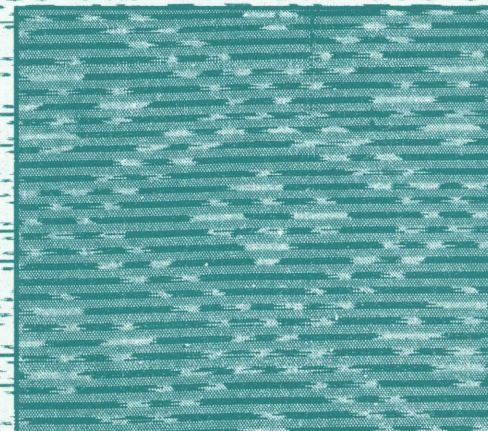
The traditional garments made in Laos of handwoven fabrics include the *sampot* (silk knee-length trousers formed by drawing the ends of a sarong-type skirt between the legs) worn by men and the silk striped or *mat-mee* patterned women's skirt with a wide band of weft brocade around the hem, often in gold or silver thread. Weft brocade techniques are also used in the silk and metallic scarf that once served as the top of a woman's costume and is now usually worn over a blouse. Wider shawls are made of both silk and cotton using the same techniques. The designs in these fabrics are combinations of geometric patterns, plant forms, figures of human, animal or mythological characters similar to those portrayed in Lao paintings and wood carvings. Many members of the Lao community in Portland still wear these highly valued garments for special occasions.

Lao weaving, like other forms of Lao art, should not remain crystalized within forever-recurring forms of the past. But change and development into the future must be carried out with a profound knowledge of what went before. The Lao weaver of the present seeks inspiration in the traditions and characteristics that have given Lao art its intrinsic value and the individual flavor that sets it apart from the other arts of the Far East.

—Kham One Keoprasedth

Mat-mee

Mat-mee is the Lao word for ikat and refers to fabric woven of prepatterned threads. In Laos the dyed weft threads (running from selvedge to selvedge) are wound onto a simple upright frame in a repeating order. The groups of threads are tightly wrapped in an intricate pattern of lines and figures representing trees, animals or other designs. The threads are then overdyed and, when the wrappings are removed, the pattern reveals itself. These threads are then woven into the warp. The weaving requires great concentration and skill to achieve a fabric of such fine detail.



Richly colored skirt borders and shawls are woven in Laos using a supplementary weft or weft brocade technique, *keb-kit-teen-sin*. In addition to the two plain weave harnesses a pair of pattern harnesses pick up alternating groups of four threads. Either by the use of sticks placed in the pattern harnesses or by simple hand pick-up methods the motifs are woven into the fabric using individual strands of brightly colored or metallic thread. This time-consuming process produces designs which are both geometric and representational in form.

Keb-kit-teen-sin

The Future of Lao Weaving

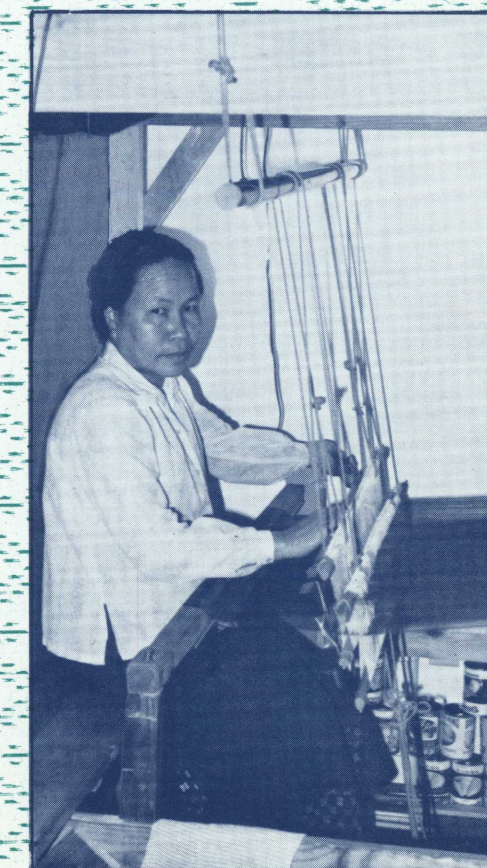
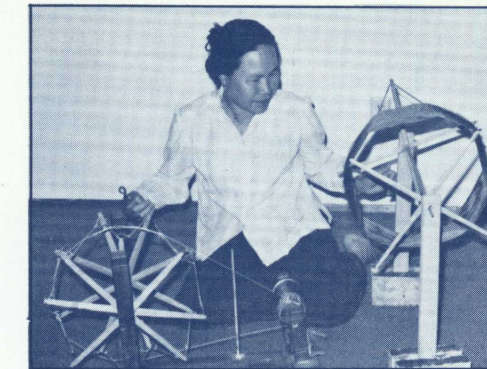
As a handweaver surrounded by the high technology of twentieth century America, I have often wanted to travel great distances to find places where traditional handweaving is still a productive part of daily life, rather than a respite from it. So, when I discovered that right here in Portland there are weavers from Laos still practicing their art, I was very excited. I felt incredibly lucky when I was actually able to assist and learn from one of these women, Pheng Thamma Khanti.

Mrs. Pheng was born in Vientiane, Laos. She began learning to weave as a very young girl. At eight years old she was helping to produce cotton clothing for the family and at sixteen she was working with silk—designing and producing intricate ikat and weft brocade fabrics. From the beginning she was involved in all aspects of her craft: growing cotton, raising silk worms, spinning and reeling the fibers, dyeing and weaving. In 1950 Mrs. Pheng married a military man and they had two children. Mrs. Pheng continued to weave and sold her fabrics in the open market. Two years ago, in 1980, she came to the United States first settling in Minnesota and then moving to Portland.

I do not speak Lao and although Mrs. Pheng speaks some English we have no weaving vocabulary in common. In spite of this, Mrs. Pheng has had the patience to teach me many of the processes she goes through in her work. In watching Mrs. Pheng there is more to be learned than the techniques unique to Lao weavers. I am continually amazed at the skill with which she handles the very fine threads and the intricate designs that go into her fabrics. The loom and other tools of her craft are very simple and yet the fabrics she produces are deeply vibrant with pattern and color. In this weaver's work there is no confusion between the accomplishments of the woman and the capacities of the machine—Mrs. Pheng is very clearly an artist, the total master of her tools.

All over the world skills such as these are being lost, but here in Portland we have a wonderful opportunity to protect and encourage this unconscious fiber art. There is much that we can learn about and from this type of weaving and the people who create it. We can support the weavers by buying Lao fabrics to bring color and design into our homes and to share with our friends. Our museums can acquire pieces for their collections to preserve the art for future generations of Lao as well as others. As a community we can help the Lao weavers to establish self-reliant commercial ventures to maintain an essential element of their culture. Through these efforts we can show our appreciation for the value of this skill, the beauty of the fabrics it produces and the people who practice this art.

—Pauline Sargent Deppen





8245 S.W. Barnes Road Portland, Oregon 97225 503 297-5544

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NOV 01 1982

METROPOLITAN ARTS COMMISSION

October 29, 1982

Ms. Janet McMahon
Metropolitan Arts Commission
1120 SW Fifth, Room 518
Portland, OR 97204

Dear Janet:

Enclosed is our invoice for \$1,800 for the Laotian weavers project.
As we discussed, I have indicated administrative costs since our
contract does state that we provide administrative services.

Thanks again for your help.

Sincerely,

Teal Silverstein
Administrative Assistant

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METROPOLITAN ARTS COMMISSION

RECEIVED
MAR 22 1982
METROPOLITAN ARTS COMMISSION

MULTIARTS PROJECT APPLICATION

For: Afro-American _____ Southeast Asian XX East County _____

APPLICANT Kham One Keopraseuth Phone 254-9005
c/o Oregon School of Arts and Crafts

ADDRESS 8245 S.W. Barnes Road
Portland, OR 97225

SPONSORING ORGANIZATION & CONTACT PERSON Oregon School of Arts and Crafts
Nan Tupper-Malone - 297-5544
Development Director

A. BRIEF PROJECT DESCRIPTION (use reverse or additional sheets if necessary):
See attached sheet.

B. ESTIMATED BUDGET

1. Expenses (please itemize)

Project Director-Kham One Keopraseuth \$500.00

P.R. Director 300.00

EQUIPMENT: Beater for adapting loom 200.00

Purchase of Loom & shipping 700.00

Supplies for Weaving 400.00

Brochure: Design/Printing (2000) 1,500.00

TOTAL EXPENSES \$ 3,600.00

2. Amount requested from MultiArts TOTAL REQUEST \$ 3,300.00

3. Do you have any other sources of income? No

If yes, please identify:

_____ \$ _____

TOTAL OTHER INCOME \$ _____

C. PLEASE ATTACH ANY ADDITIONAL INFORMATION YOU FEEL MAY BE USEFUL.

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MULTIARTS PROJECT APPLICATION

Submitted by: Kham One Keopraseuth and the
Oregon School of Arts and Crafts

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This project is divided into two parts: a short- and long-term component. The first component is designed to meet the immediate needs of two Laotian artisans in our community: Mrs. Pheng Thammakhanti and Mrs. Litsamay Chandravongsri. Each of these women are accomplished weavers having learned their craft in Laos.

Pheng Thammakhanti now has a loom in her home which requires adaptation in order to make it practical for use with heavier yarns. The loom was originally constructed for use with silk thread--a very expensive material in the United States making the finished product quite costly and outside the grasp of most potential buyers. To accommodate heavier material, such as wool, a new beater must be made for the existing loom.

Litsamay Chandravongsri presently has no loom with which to work; however, one has been located in California which is available for sale. This grant would provide the funds to purchase and ship the loom to Portland allowing the artisan to again pursue her craft.

In addition, there are funds in the proposal for purchase of supplies to allow the women to begin their work.

The second component of the project will have a far-reaching effect in assisting the Laotian artisans in our community to organize the presentation of their work. With the initial direction of the project coordinator, Kham One Keopraseuth, the artisans would join together in an association, present their work in carefully selected galleries in the area and, finally, have a brochure printed indicating the type of crafts available, a cultural perspective of the work and how a buyer might acquire the crafts.

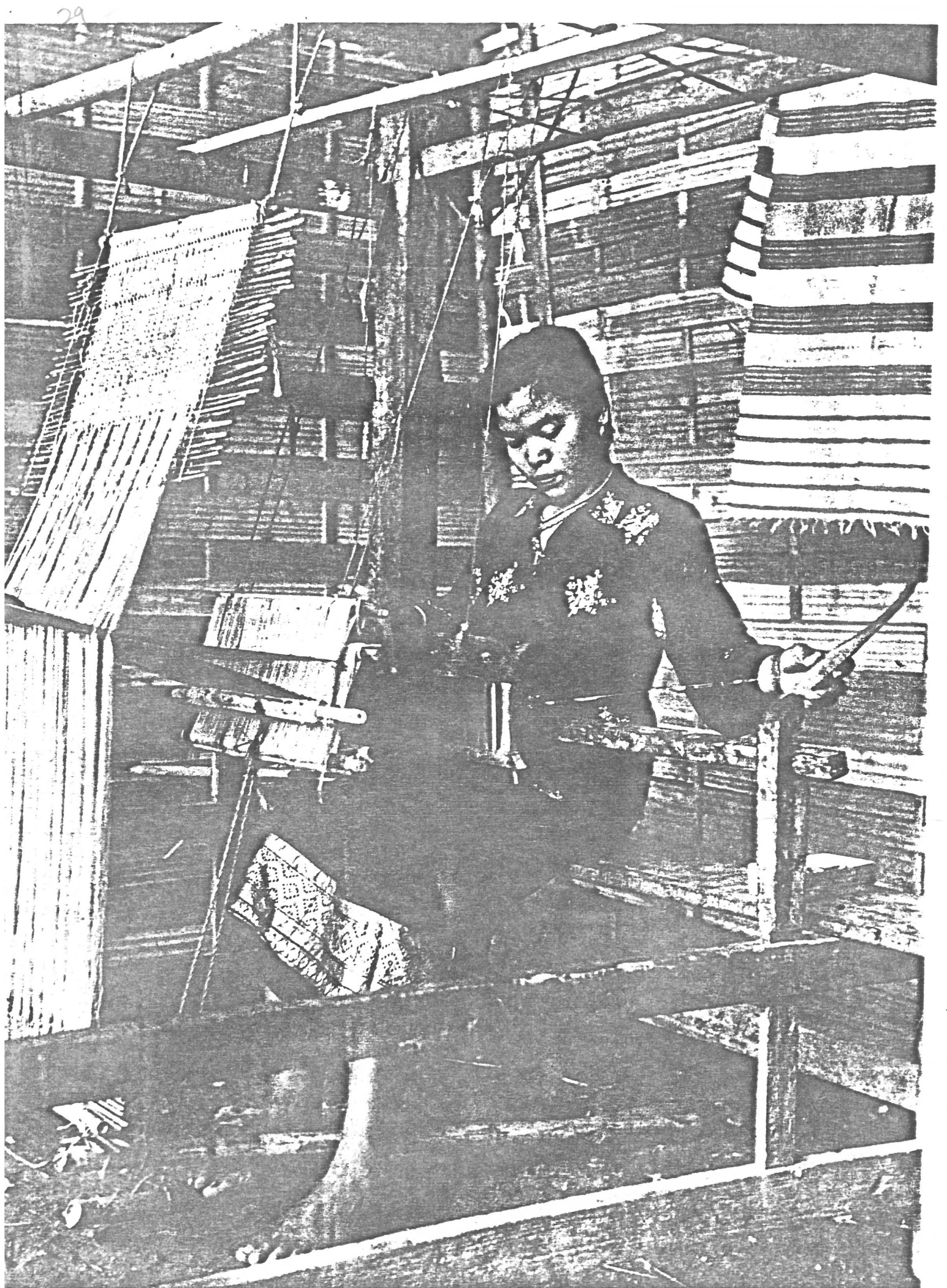
The goal of this component is two-fold:

- To educate not only the host community to the Laotian culture, but to help the Laotian community itself in maintaining its cultural traditions.
- To assist a segment of the Laotian community in achieving self-sufficiency through the maintenance of traditional crafts.

The period of the project will extend twelve months from the date of approval with a structure set up for the on-going life of the association.

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This project may be considered an initial step of many in providing assistance to the artisans of a Southeast Asian community. Among the ideas that this project has generated for future work are workshops for immigrant artisans with the possible topics covering how to market their craft effectively; learning how to deal with galleries; what resources are available to the artist/craftsman in the Northwest region; and government support of the arts.

The role of the Oregon School of Arts and Crafts in this project is to provide support to the project director in accomplishing the tasks outlined. The professional staff of the School will be available to Mr. Keopraseuth on a consultant basis without charge to provide background and expertise in making the association a reality. It will be to the benefit of not only the School but the community at large if the talent and craftsmanship of the Laotian community is fostered and encouraged. Because this is the first project of this nature the School has undertaken, the only consultant time we can accurately forecast is that of the P.R. Director in providing advice on the printing of the brochure; however, the Staff will track on consulting time provided and include it in a final report to the Metropolitan Arts Commission.



30

The woman in the photo below is using her spinning wheel to make cotton fiber into thread. At right we see a woman at her loom weaving cotton cloth. From the cloth she will make garments for her family.



USIS

After that she makes the cloth into garments. Some housewives also have a spinning wheel, where they spin silk or cotton thread."

Inside the House

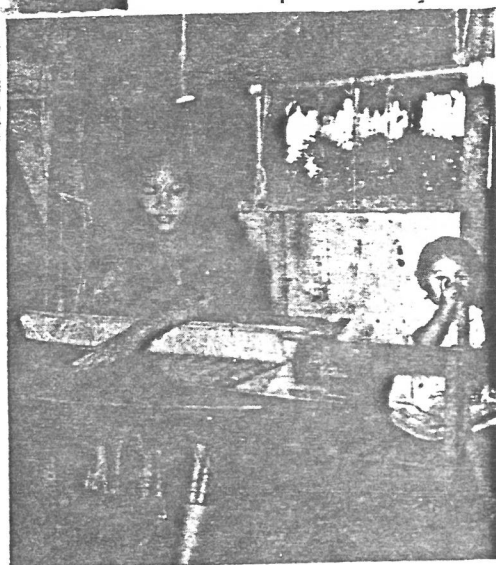
Two stairways led up to the living area of the house. Actually, they were more like ladders than stairs. The stairs at the front of the house opened on a long, covered veranda. Back of the veranda was a large living room. Beside one of

ARTS AND CRAFTS



a) Young Laotian's shawl and *sin*

Photos R. Cauchetier



b) Loom

38.
**OREGON
SCHOOL
OF ARTS
AND CRAFTS**

8245 S.W. Barnes Road Portland, Oregon 97225 503 297-5544

March 19, 1982

RECEIVED
MAR 22 1982

METROPOLITAN ARTS COMMISSION

Janet McMahon
Metropolitan Arts Commission
430 S.W. Morrison Street, Room 314
Portland, OR 97204

Dear Janet:

Please find enclosed an application for a grant from the Multiarts Program submitted by Kham One Keopraseuth and the Oregon School of Arts and Crafts.

In working with Kham One in developing this proposal, his dedication to helping the Laotian community was apparent. But even more than this has been his invaluable assistance in a current project at the School funded by the NEA. The Laotian Wood Carving project is not in its third term of study. Mr. Lang Rangsith, the master carver from Laos giving the instruction, speaks very little English and Kham One has given freely of his personal time to assist Mr. Lang and the School in accomplishing the goals of the project. It has been this very positive experience with Kham One that leads us to believe that this project will be equally successful.

If you should have any questions or wish additional information, please don't hesitate to contact me at your convenience. I am enclosing xerox copies of several magazine photos of the looms which are discussed in the proposal.

Sincerely,



Nan Tupper-Malone
Development Director

Enclosures

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METROPOLITAN ARTS COMMISSION

Oregon School of Arts & Crafts

Kham One Keopraseth

Susan Hamada

8245 SW Barnes Rd. (25) 297-5544

ORD. NO./CONTRACT NO 153286 ~~2009720099~~

DATE COVERED: From 5-26-82 To 6-30-83

[illegible]

HISTORY OF FUNDING

1
