HMONG CULTURAL CENTER
INTERACTIVE MEDIA EXHIBIT PLAN
Hmong Cultural Center is the primary Hmong and Asian American organization in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area that provides community outreach activities related to multicultural education for the purposes of promoting positive race relations in the Twin Cities community.

The Hmong Cultural Center is home to the Hmong Resource Center Library, which is perhaps the most comprehensive collection of Hmong-related literature, scholarly research, and multimedia materials in North America. The Hmong History Center offers many displays that teach about the Hmong people, their history, their culture and their experience in the U.S. over the past 25 years. Please visit our center if you live in the Twin Cities or are planning on visiting Minneapolis-St. Paul.

The Cultural Arts Education Program at Hmong Cultural Center offers classes for the Qeej instrument, Hmong dance, and Hmong marriage and funeral songs.

Hmong Cultural Center offers multicultural education through the Hmong 101 Program which provides interactive presentations about Hmong culture, as well as a multimedia arts education website intended to teach about Hmong history, culture and folk arts.

The long-running Adult Education Program at Hmong Cultural Center offers citizenship class, general ESL classes, and occupational English classes and career advising.
ABOUT EXHIBITION SPACE

HCC has an estimated 532 square feet of exhibit space throughout its facilities. One of our biggest challenges due to resource constraints has been creating viable exhibit spaces for our participants. We have addressed these challenges of insufficient space and resources by creating multi-purposes rooms that serve as a learning environment and exhibitry spaces. A great example that we have been proud of is the addition of exhibit space into our computer lab. We have turned a traditional computer lab into a multi purpose space which includes musical instruments and textiles.

Each gallery maintains a focus on the following Hmong subjects:
- Gallery 1 - Culture, tradition, and memory
- Gallery 2 - Oral traditions, and Qeej
- Gallery 3 - Instruments and Paj Ntuab or Story Cloth
HCC seeks to create an immersive, interactive, and robust experience for exhibit attendees. The plan is to create media plan which will consist of installing iPads with interactive browsing capabilities to view recorded content on Hmong history and culture. Seven iPads will be dispersed throughout the exhibit space to provide additional context for artifacts throughout the HCC. All the iPads will have a friendly user interface that allows participants to view video content. In addition the design of a web app will allow the HCC to easily update content on each individual iPads.
INTERACTIVE MEDIA LAYOUT

Each interactive device will have an a web application that will be designed, updated, and implemented by exhibit designer Sieng Lee. With a simple touch/swipe of a video thumbnail viewers will be able to browse video content and also simply play them in fullscreen with audio. All devices will be securely mounted onto a wall or on a podium.
INTERACTIVE MEDIA CONTENT

HCC has been a leader in collecting and preserving Hmong traditions through video recordings that have been archived and uploaded onto Youtube for free use. The media content is ready to be use within the exhibit space along with interactive devices. Below are some of the many videos that will be used within the exhibit space and can all be found at the HCC’s Youtube page:

**Funeral Songs:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZwPJSBW03Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZwPJSBW03Q)

**Qeej Songs:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XnT5gA-FSBE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XnT5gA-FSBE)

**Wedding Songs:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rdc3BwKWWe0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rdc3BwKWWe0)

**Mej Koob Ceremony:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNgQ9_BmeaM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNgQ9_BmeaM)

**Hmong Marriage Lecture:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QlXgRjhi4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QlXgRjhi4)

**Qeej:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHzNXlulGc&t=472s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHzNXlulGc&t=472s)

**Hmong Qeej Troupe:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FeoXl5-ygmY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FeoXl5-ygmY)

**Flute:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xjvkn6BD1M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xjvkn6BD1M)

**Two-string Violin:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PerHbL_o0vw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PerHbL_o0vw)

**Leaflet:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPSMNEcv3Xk&t=73s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPSMNEcv3Xk&t=73s)

**Ncas:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mi8uYtKzE3Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mi8uYtKzE3Q)

**Paj Ntuab:**
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihf6ELqEma4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihf6ELqEma4)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AX6WSSiCtzA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AX6WSSiCtzA)
HMONG FUNERAL SONGS

It is not entirely clear when the funeral practices of the Hmong came into origin. It is likely that these procedures including recited funeral songs have existed for hundreds of years. Hmong funeral songs have been passed down between generations and continue to be important parts of Hmong funerals in Minnesota.

While the 3 day traditional Hmong funeral includes many songs, the performance of the Qhuab Ke (Guiding or Showing the Way) song is often considered to constitute the most significant part of the Hmong funeral. The Qhuab Ke song explains how the world was created and the events which eventually led to disease, sickness and death. The song continues on to guide the soul of the deceased to the afterlife. The reciter performing the song typically informs himself of the various places the dead person lived and uses this information to show gratitude to him or her before the journey to join ancestors in the afterworld. The lyrics of the Qhuab Ke song also includes a series of specific instructions on how the soul of the deceased should navigate his or her way on the various stages of a difficult journey and eventually find their original ancestors. Over the years, Western anthropological scholars have translated this lengthy song as they have analyzed Hmong religion and the Hmong cultural belief system.

Hmong Cultural Center in Saint Paul has taught Funeral Songs to adult students since its founding in 1992 as part of a Cultural Customs class. Students in the class listen to a Master teacher and must perfect a certain pitch and memorize a series of complex and lengthy songs. It usually takes at least a year and often longer for students to master the funeral song curriculum. Hmong Cultural Center has played an important role in training a generation of funeral song performers over the past quarter century who continue to carry on this important tradition at Hmong funerals in Minnesota and other states.

HMONG WEDDING SONGS

Similar to the situation with Hmong funeral songs, the history of the Hmong Wedding Song tradition is largely undocumented. Hmong Wedding Songs have likely been passed down for hundreds of years and they continue to constitute an important part of Hmong Wedding ceremonies in Minnesota and the United States.

The traditional Hmong Wedding takes at least two days. It involves a series of steps involving wedding party visits to first the groom’s parents’ house and then at the bride’s parents’ home and then back at the groom’s home. Throughout the process, Mej Koob (negotiators) for both the bride and groom have an important role to play in facilitating the marriage process and serving as an intermediary between families. There are typically two Mej Koobs involved for each side. In the ceremony, Mej Koobs also sing recited wedding songs and give blessings to the new husband and wife. Chanted wedding songs are an essential part of the wedding ceremony and represent blessings and prayers for good fortune to the new couple. During each part of the wedding process, the Mej Koobs sing designated wedding songs. Each song represents a particular stage in the wedding.

Much like Hmong funeral songs, reciting Wedding songs involves a complex artistry that takes considerable practice and expertise to master. Hmong Cultural Center in Saint Paul has taught Wedding Songs to adult students since its founding in 1992 as part of a Cultural Customs class. Students in the class listen to a Master teacher and must perfect a certain pitch and memorize a series of complex and lengthy songs that are typically recited at Hmong Weddings over the period of many months. One of the songs taught in the class at Hmong Cultural Center include Zaj Npua Luam Xim = Food Offering to the Family. This orally recited Wedding Song is performed at the Hmong Wedding Ceremony to invite the family and relatives to the Wedding Feast. Another song that students learn is Zaj Qaib QhiaTsiaj = Offering of Chickens for Good Fortune. This orally recited Wedding Song is performed during the Hmong Wedding Ceremony as a hoped for source of good luck and fortune for the couple. This song is performed at the end process of negotiating at the bride’s parents house.

THE QEEJ INSTRUMENT

With a history likely going back hundreds of years, the Qeej (pronounced Keng) has been described as a universally recognized cultural symbol for the Hmong diaspora across the world. While other ethnic groups in Southeast Asia have somewhat similar instruments, the fairly large size and haunting chords distinguish the Hmong Qeej. The Qeej instrument is typically made from 6 bamboo free reed pipes of differing lengths which are at first soaked, steamed and then bent so that they are curved. The bamboo pipes are banded together and then coupled into a wind chamber that holds air similar to a bag on a bagpipe.

The sound of the Qeej has been described as somewhat sorrowful as it is associated with Hmong funerals by many Hmong though it is also played for other purposes including entertainment and at festivals including the New Year. In the traditional Hmong funeral, the Qeej instrument has a very important role. Indeed, such a funeral cannot occur without the presence of the Qeej player. In such funerals, the Qeej is supposed to be played continuously for three days. The sound of the instrument is intended to directly communicate with the spirit of the deceased and offer assistance and direction on a path for the spirit to properly continue to the afterworld. For many Hmong, the strong association the instrument has with the afterworld mandates caution in its usage. Outside of the funeral ceremony, the Qeej instrument is not typically played in the home but rather outside or at another neutral location where the instrument is thought to less likely attract the attention of harmful spirits.

In Southeast Asia, Hmong males typically learn to play the Qeej. This is still largely true in the United States, though some Hmong American females have learned to play the instrument in recent years at community organizations including Hmong Cultural Center in Saint Paul. Each Qeej song played on the instrument has Hmong language words associated with it. At Hmong Cultural Center, children and youth learn a curriculum of 12 funeral songs and several songs for entertainment by memorizing these words as well as a notation system involving finger placement on holes. Dance steps are also learned for song performances. A desire to carry on knowledge of playing the Qeej and pass along Hmong cultural traditions was a key motivation for the founding of the Hmong Cultural Center in 1992. From 1992 to the present, the Hmong Cultural Center has continued to offer a popular class of afterschool classes in Qeej instruction to children and youth.
INTRODUCTION TO HMONG EMBROIDERY

The Hmong embroidery tradition goes back hundreds of years. Hmong embroidery is an artistic tradition that was passed down by families over many generations. More traditional Hmong embroidery pieces used symbols to express themes in what has been described as a form of language that represents the Hmong culture and identity. Hmong embroidery has changed over the years. Hmong women have adapted traditional motifs and developed new styles of paj ntaub (story cloths) and embroidered crafts for commercial purposes, especially targeted to tourists and the Western market. While traditional textile decorations go back generations, story cloths are of more recent origin. These tapestries first appeared in the 1980s when the Hmong people lived in the refugee camps. There was little opportunity to make money, so the women used their embroidery skills to earn income to support their families. On the story cloths, the women depicted the war experience and refugee camps through embroidery needlework and similarly the village life that the Hmong were once familiar with when they lived in Laos. In recent years, some story cloths have even taken on themes related to American life including Christianity and holidays such as Christmas. The methods and techniques utilized for making Hmong embroidery have also changed to some extent. Items are not necessarily sewn by hand any longer. Cotton and synthetic fibers are also now preferred over hemp as the latter is heavy and may be difficult to find.

Different techniques are used to make Hmong embroidery. These include: Applique which involves ornamental needlework in which pieces of fabric are sewn or stuck onto a piece of fabric to form pictures or patterns; Batik which is a method of producing colored designs on textiles by dyeing them after having first applied wax to the parts of the fabric to be left undyed and Reverse Applique, a decoration or ornament, as in needlework, made by cutting and sewing the upper material to expose the fabric below.

HMONG EMBROIDERY SYMBOLS

Hmong Embroidery features many symbols. The symbols listed below may be found on a wide range of Hmong embroidery pieces as well as story cloths (paj ntaub). It should be noted that interpretations of the meanings of symbols may vary significantly. Those listed here are common Hmong American interpretations.