



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 3, 2025



**EXHIBITION ON TRANSNATIONAL RIVER JUSTICE TO OPEN
AT THE MSU BROAD ART MUSEUM THIS MONTH**

*Mekong Voices shares themes of environmentalism, Indigeneity,
identity, community, knowledge, and culture.*

East Lansing, MI – The Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University (MSU Broad Art Museum) is pleased to announce the upcoming exhibition *Mekong Voices: Transnational River Justice in Mainland Southeast Asia*, opening September 14, 2025. This exhibition was born out of the Mekong Culture WELL project, an internationally collaborative and multilingual initiative at MSU that foregrounds cultural and interdisciplinary dimensions of water, ecologies, land, and livelihoods transformations across Mainland Southeast Asia: Southern China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

More than 65 million people who are members of over 70 different ethno-linguistic communities depend on the Mekong River for their livelihoods and futures. At its seasonal peak, 475 billion

cubic meters of water course through 4,800 kilometers of river. Though it is the twelfth longest river in the world, the Mekong River is the second most biodiverse and the most productive freshwater fishery. Yet, like so many rivers, lakes, and watersheds here in Michigan and worldwide, the vitality of the Mekong River and its chorus of voices, both human and non-human, are critically imperiled by damming, development schemes, and climate change.

“The extraordinary ecological vitality and diversity of the Mekong River has nurtured cultural and ecological diversity across the region for millennia,” comments Dr. Amanda Flaim, Mekong Culture WELL director, associate professor in MSU’s James Madison College and Department of Sociology, and co-curator of *Mekong Voices*. “But this dual abundance is critically imperiled by development agendas across the region. For the past five years, the Mekong Culture WELL’s international team of engineers, scientists, social scientists, documentary filmmakers, and artists collaborated in a common effort to understand and map these transformations and their irrevocable impacts on fishes, forests, and communities who have depended on them for generations.”

Dr. Flaim continues, “No dataset, map, or scientific model produced through our project can compare to the evocative work that Southeast Asian artists are doing to capture and translate the memories, experiences, grief, joy, dreams, and visions held by fishing communities and everyday people across this vital region. Only artists can really capture the many voices of the Mekong.”

Inspired by Professor Kanokwan Manoram’s 2023 Thai-language essay *Siang Maenamkhong* (Mekong Voices), the exhibition asks how the Mekong speaks. How can we listen? And what futures are lost when the voices of our rivers are silenced?

“Disruption is what communities commonly experience by living along the Mekong River,” comments Marina Pok, Anicca Foundation chairwoman and co-curator of *Mekong Voices*. “Art becomes a quiet form of resilience. *Mekong Voices* honors the artists who use craft, installation, photos, and projection to translate human stories from Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia (up to the Tonlé Sap), and Vietnam (down to the Mekong Delta), for the public who will witness and interact with those livelihoods who depend on sediments, fish, freshwater, and aqua-agriculture from the Mekong River.” Cambodians celebrate the traditional Water Festival in November, when the Mekong River changes course, a time full of color, joy, and food.

MSU itself sits on the Red Cedar River Watershed, a diverse ecosystem of grasslands, wetlands, forests, agriculture, and urbanized area. While geographically distant from each other, there is yet much that connects these two river systems in the ways they have and continue to support the communities that depend on them.

By following the Mekong River’s diverse ecosystems, which are deeply entangled across vast landscapes and refuse to be bound by lines on maps, *Mekong Voices* shares the role of traditional craft, eco-art, and “artivism” as a means of translating and echoing themes of environmentalism, Indigeneity, identity, community, knowledge, and culture.

“The exhibition expands understandings of what activism looks like and points to the powerful ways that art can be a radical form of protest against injustices,” says Kelsey Merreck Wagner, artist, anthropologist, and co-curator of *Mekong Voices*. “Spanning a myriad of mediums, conceptual approaches, and foci from across the Mekong region, these artists highlight possibilities for creative dissent that communities around the world can be inspired by and learn from.”

In learning to listen to our rivers' many voices, we can also learn how to better care for them, and ourselves, in the process.

The MSU Broad Art Museum is open Wednesday–Sunday from 10am–6pm. Admission is always free. Learn more at broadmuseum.msu.edu.

Mekong Voices: Transnational River Justice in Mainland Southeast Asia (Sep. 14, 2025–Feb. 22, 2026) is organized by the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University and co-curated by Marina Pok, chairwoman, Anicca Foundation; Kelsey Merreck Wagner, Ph.D. graduate, MSU Department of Anthropology; Dalina A. Perdomo Álvarez, assistant curator; Dr. Amanda Flaim, associate professor, MSU James Madison College and Department of Sociology; and Steven L. Bridges, senior curator and director of curatorial affairs; with support from Mekong Culture WELL Project Postdoctoral Fellows Wisa Wisesjindawat-Fink and Sopheak Chann, and from student research assistants Savitri Ashalata Anantharaman, Leo Baldiga, Katherine Chamberlin, Madison Kennedy-Kequom, Maddie Morrison, Thanh Tran, and Apichaya Thaneerat. Support for this exhibition is provided by the Eli and Edythe Broad Endowed Exhibitions Fund. The Mekong Culture WELL Project (2020–25) is generously funded by a Henry Luce Foundation LuceSEA grant.

Artists: Ruangsak Anuwatwimon, Baan Had Bai Tai Lue Weavers Group, Pao Houa Her, Nim Kong, Wa Lone, Yim Maline, Kalyanee Mam, Dylan AT Miner, Vasana Sitthiket, Lim Sokchanlina, Thang Sothea, Sao Sreymao, Ubatsat, and Kawita Vatanajyankur.

The Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University (MSU Broad Art Museum) connects people with art through experiences that inspire curiosity and inquiry. Presenting exhibitions and programs that engage diverse communities around issues of local relevance and global significance, the MSU Broad Art Museum advances the university values of quality, inclusion, and connectivity. Opened on November 10, 2012, the museum was designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Zaha Hadid and named in honor of Eli and Edythe Broad, longtime supporters of the university who provided the lead gift for its creation.

Michigan State University has been working to advance the common good in uncommon ways for more than 150 years. One of the top research universities in the world, MSU focuses its vast resources on creating solutions to some of the world's most pressing challenges, while providing life-changing opportunities to a diverse and inclusive academic community through more than 200 programs of study in 17 degree-granting colleges.

Image: Sao Sreymao, *Old Village* from the series *Between Land and Water*, 2023. Courtesy the artist

###

MSU Broad Art Museum representatives are available for interview.

Media Contact:
Zoe Kissel
Director of Communications
kisselzo@msu.edu
broadmuseum.msu.edu