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Fowler Museum to display a new donation of Cambodian shop signs

Fowler in Focus: Cambodian Shop Signs: A Gift to the Fowler Museum from Joel G. Montague Opens Dec 2

Charming hand-painted signs for local businesses appearing in the streets of Cambodia's cities in the 1990s marked the beginning of a new era of private economic activity in the war-torn country. *Fowler in Focus: Cambodian Shop Signs: A Gift to the Fowler Museum from Joel G. Montague*—on display at the Fowler Museum at UCLA from Dec 2, 2012–Mar 31, 2013—features twenty-five excellent examples of the genre, most recently donated to the Fowler by Massachusetts-based collector Joel Montague.

Under the brutal Khmer Rouge rule from 1975–79, Cambodia's cities were systematically emptied of their population, commercial activity ground to a halt, and even the use of currency was prohibited. This genocidal reign was finally brought to an end by the occupation of Cambodia by Vietnamese military forces, who instituted a state-controlled economic system that continued to severely limit private commercial activity.

Only with the implementation of the United Nations Transitional Authority in 1990 did private commercial activity begin to revive. Remarkably, Cambodia's re-populated urban environments came alive with hand-painted signs advertising myriad small businesses and personal services.

Painted on sheets of metal by commercial artists in tiny makeshift studios and storefronts, the signs bore lively representations of everyday goods or services—car parts, foodstuffs, tailored clothing, medical and beauty services, musical performers, and more. Today these signs provide a window into the brief period when private enterprise bloomed but had not yet come under the sway of international business interests and mass-produced advertising.

Fowler in Focus: Cambodian Shop Signs: A Gift to the Fowler Museum from Joel G. Montague is curated by Roy Hamilton, Senior Curator of Asian and Pacific Collections, Fowler Museum. The exhibition will be on view in the Fowler in Focus gallery, the central space within the long-term exhibition *Intersections: World Arts, Local Lives*. Fowler in Focus is dedicated to rotating installations of new acquisitions, sub-collections, and particular artistic genres in the Fowler's



permanent holdings.

The **Fowler Museum at UCLA** is one of the country's most respected institutions devoted to exploring the arts and cultures of Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and the Americas. The Fowler is open Wednesdays through Sundays, from noon to 5 p.m.; and on Thursdays, from noon until 8 p.m. The museum is closed Mondays and Tuesdays. The Fowler Museum, part of UCLA Arts, is located in the north part of the UCLA campus. Admission is free. Parking is available for a maximum of \$11 in Lot 4. For more information, the public may call 310/825-4361 or visit fowler.ucla.edu.

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