



Charitable Donation

Thursday, June 5, 2008

When Bryan Watt ventured to Southeast Asia with 19 of his colleagues from the Brooks Institute of Photography as part of a 100-day photographic expedition of the Mekong, he had no idea how much the endeavor would change his life. The goal of the project was to document daily life in the region, but it was the desperate needs of the children of Thailand and Laos that became the subjects of his resulting works.

Upon completing his undergraduate studies, Watt returned to Laos to study the Akha tribe in the northern regions of the country. There, Watt found himself helping the sick and injured-and gaining their trust. Shortly after returning to S.B., he convinced his wife, Leila Srour, a local pediatrician, to move with him to Laos.

Since 2002 the former Santa Barbarans have been based there, working with various health organizations, primarily in the child support field. Currently, the duo are working to build a permanent primary school for 286 children from the village of Ban Nong Boua, and Watt's alma mater and fellow alumni are stepping up to lend a hand.

On Thursday, June 5, in conjunction with the Downtown Organization's monthly 1st Thursday event, a silent auction of photographic prints will take place at Brooks Institute's Cota Street

Gallery from 5-8 p.m., with all proceeds benefiting the school. The works draw from Brooks faculty and students, as well as noted artists like Mark Seliger, Chris Rainier, and Horace Bristol.

"When we decided to produce the show, we sent out a call to the alumni and the response was overwhelming," said Brooks' Rob Winner. "Alums from all over the U.S. stepped up to the plate. One of Mark Seliger's assistants is a Brooks graduate and we contacted him. I was simply hoping for a couple of photographs, and what we got were two editioned prints from Seliger—one of Brad Pitt and another of Jerry Seinfeld." Also included in the auction are prints from many of the photographers who took part in the initial Mekong expedition.

Throughout his career, Watt has held the belief that a socially responsible photographer leaves with a part of his subject's soul, and in return, must give back by helping those in need. And through Thursday, July 10, Brooks's Cota Street Gallery will see a community of photographers doing just that.

Lao Children Fundraiser

Proceeds support the rebuilding of a school in Laos.

When: [Thursday, June 5, 2008](#), 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Where: [Brooks Institute's Gallery 27](#), 27 E. Cota Street, Santa Barbara

Cost: Free

Age limit: Not available

Categories: [Calendar of Fundraisers](#)

Description: Brooks Institute hosts a fundraiser to help Brooks graduate, Bryan Watt, and his wife, Leila Srour, rebuild a school and children's center in Laos. Brooks will hold a photographic exhibition of prints from May 26 to July 10th.

Bryan Watt graduated from Brooks Institute's undergraduate program in December 1998. He then entered the graduate program and became a graduate assistant teaching the first two courses in the professional photography program. While he was a student, he spent time in Laos where he was overwhelmed by the desperate need of children in the area. Returning to the U.S. he inspired his wife, Dr. Leila Srour, to give up her pediatric practice in Santa Barbara and move to Laos to help these children in need. In May of 2002, they made the move and have lived and worked there ever since.

In the northern city of Muang Sing in Laos near the Chinese border, there is a temporary classroom structure built out of sticks with a thatched roof. The Watts' current objective is to rebuild a permanent school with a children's center for 286 children. Brooks Institute is dedicated to help them achieve this goal. On June 5, 2008 we will have a silent auction of prints donated from the alumni, staff, faculty, and friends of Brooks Institute in an effort to raise the \$20,000 needed to complete the project.