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Press Release

888: Portraits in Taiwan
Watercolor Portraits of Indigenous Taiwanese Peoples

During June 1-30, 2012, the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in New York (TECO-NY) will present a multimedia exhibit by the Brooklyn-based artist Brenda Zlamany titled “888: Portraits in Taiwan.” The exhibit documents the first chapter in her ongoing project *The Itinerant Portraitist*, in which she explores the constructive effects of portraiture in communities around the globe.

From July 1 to September 30, 2011, Zlamany traveled in Taiwan with the support of a Fulbright grant, primarily visiting indigenous villages. She made 888 watercolor portraits of the people she met, using the camera lucida, a device for drawing that dates back to the Renaissance and that promotes a two-way exchange between artist and subject.

Traveling with her ten-year-old daughter, a fluent Mandarin speaker, helped Zlamany persuade strangers to participate. Each subject signed his or her portrait and was then photographed with it. The signature, an important element in Chinese art, marked the work as collaborative. As word of the project spread on the island, it had a unifying effect. People were introduced to one another by leafing through the sketchbooks.

Reflecting on her experiences, Zlamany said, “Because of the generosity, hospitality, and openness of the people, Taiwan was the ideal country for the launch of my project. My daughter and I were invited to join in all aspects of community life. Not only did people open their homes to us, help us navigate the varied and beautiful topography, and make introductions for us along the way—they also trusted me with their images. They believed in the project and encouraged us. I was impressed with the warmth and directness of the aboriginal people. Each tribe has its own social structure and customs. It was a privilege to partake in their festivals, learn about their music, dance, and crafts, and share in the wide variety of foods.”

In portrait painting, a connection between the artist and the subject is created by the act of building an image stroke by stroke. Such a connection is unusual in this time of high-speed, mediated experience. “888: Portraits in Taiwan” addresses the multifaceted nature of portraiture in the digital age. The project incorporates aspects of traditional artwork (portraiture; painting), performance art (living the production of the work; enlisting strangers to participate; ritually photographing them with the finished portrait), and conceptual art (production according to quotas and timetables; the recursive inclusion of the painted portrait in a new portrait when the subject is photographed holding it). By combining painting, performance, interactivity, photography, a conceptual frame, and a digital presentation, “888: Portraits in Taiwan” challenges schisms in artistic as well as social understanding.

A multimedia installation based on Zlamany’s adventures in Taiwan was first presented at the

Museum of Contemporary Art in Taipei. The version at TECO-NY consists of fifteen Moleskine sketchbooks containing portraits in watercolor and pencil, a mural-size map charting the locations where the portraits were made, a documentary video showing the portraits being painted throughout Taiwan, larger-than-life projections of photographs showing subjects holding their portraits, and eight oil paintings of aboriginal teenage boys made by Zlamany in her studio in Brooklyn after her return.

TECO-NY is located at 1 East 42nd Street. The exhibit will be open from 9am to 6pm, Monday through Friday, and from 9am to 11am on Saturdays. For further questions, please contact Ashley Sun at slc@taipei.org or by phone at 212-317-7352.

Bio:

Brenda Zlamany is a painter who lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. Since 1982 her work has appeared in over a dozen solo exhibitions and many group shows in the United States, Europe, and Asia. Museums that have exhibited her work include the Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei; the National Portrait Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution; the National Museum, Gdansk; and Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Ghent. Her work has been reviewed in *Artforum*, *Art in America*, *Flash Art*, the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times*, and elsewhere and is held in the collections of the Cincinnati Art Museum; Deutsche Bank; the Museum of Modern Art, Houston; the Neuberger Museum of Art; the Virginia Museum of Fine Art; and the World Bank. She has received portrait commissions from the World Bank, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, and other institutions. Zlamany has collaborated with authors and editors of the *New York Times Magazine* on several commissions, including an image of Marian Anderson for an article by Jessye Norman and one of Osama bin Laden for the September 11, 2005, cover.