



Emmy Lou Packard in Diego Rivera mural



Artichoke Picker, Emmy Lou Packard

Emmy Lou Packard — Artist of Conscience

Richmond Art Center

June 21, 2022 through August 19, 2022

The goal of the exhibition is to present the art of this remarkable artist, the values that it expresses and the world that she lived in. Packard was a committed progressive who supported and worked for civil rights, peace, the farmworkers and other issues. She was a printmaker who worked in linoleum. Most of her prints are large, created for people who love art but could never afford to buy a painting. By and large, her art was not overtly political. Instead she created images that celebrated ordinary people; their work, their play and their world, including the nature that surrounds us. This approach is best exemplified by her print, *Peace is a Human Right*, distributed as a poster around the world. It shows three children; Asian, black and white, sitting around a giant sunflower. A dove sits on one child's hand. Its message is framed in human terms. Children are not political; they are just children. Her print of an artichoke picker in the fields is not a Stalinist "homage to the worker." It is a lyric celebration of the connection between man and nature.

The impetus for the exhibition is SF MOMA's major Rivera exhibition, *Rivera's America*, which will have a special focus on his work in the United States. As part of the exhibition, Rivera's Treasure Island mural, which Packard worked on, and in which she appears, has been moved to SF MOMA from San Francisco City College. James Oles, curator of the SF MOMA show is enthusiastic about the idea of a Packard show as a parallel exhibition that would attract people interested in exploring Rivera's connections with the bay area. He told us that he will support it in any way he can. SF MOMA is

planning programming and activities with sites of the other San Francisco Rivera murals, and institutions and venues in minority communities, and the Richmond Art Center will do similar events in the East Bay.

Emmy Lou Packard Bio

As a child Packard lived in Mexico where she was given art lessons by Diego Rivera. After studying art at the California School of Fine Arts (now the San Francisco Art Institute) she returned to Mexico and lived with Rivera and Frida Kahlo and worked as Rivera's assistant. In 1939 Rivera traveled to San Francisco, where he painted his Pan American Unity mural at the World's Fair on Treasure Island. Packard was the chief assistant on this monumental work.

During the war years Packard edited and created art for the Kaiser shipyard paper in Richmond. In the 1950s she taught art in the San Francisco schools and was a founder of the Graphic Arts Workshop. She created a series of prints that captured the old San Francisco produce market, and another that captured field workers in various crops. She also created 85-foot long bas-relief mural at UC Berkeley. Her connections with the California Labor School, where Maya Angelou studied dance and the noted psychoanalyst Erik Erikson taught, was the reason she received a subpoena to testify in front of the House UnAmerican Activities Committee, although the hearing was cancelled.

This may have been a factor in her move to Mendocino during the 60s, where she created images of local history and the rich marine environment, and took the lead in the movement to save the Mendocino headlands and turn it into a state park. It's visitor center includes a room that displays her art and honors her efforts.

Her work continued to resonate. A well-known anti-war poster during the Vietnam era shows Joan Baez and her sister Mimi Fariña sitting in front of an Emmy Lou Packard print.

In the 70s Packard moved back to San Francisco where she would live in the Mission district for the rest of her life. She continued making art, including the rediscovered bas-relief commissioned for the restaurant at Kaiser Center in Oakland. Packard cleaned and restored the WPA murals at Coit Tower, and participated in landmarking the Rincon Annex post office which contains the historic murals of Anton Refrigier. She was a mentor and role model to a whole generation of artists in the Mission district. She died in 1998.

Exhibition Contents

The Emmy Lou Packard show will include material from

- Early days and work with Diego Rivera
- World War II: art in the Kaiser shipyards

- The 50s – social and political art, including the Graphic Arts Workshop and SF Schools; images of labor in San Francisco and in the fields, and the Peace is a Human Rights poster
- The natural world — Mendocino: landscapes and seascapes, architecture and history
- Back in San Francisco – portraits and mentoring a new generation of Latino artists and muralists

Exhibition Materials

The show will contain from 30 to 50 prints, accompanied by photographs; including images of Packard by Rivera and Dorothea Lange, interpretive material such as her sketchbook, printing tools and her press.

Visitors will also gain an insight into her work on the Rivera mural by watching clips of interviews with Packard and images of the Treasure Island mural from the American Masters documentary *Rivera in America* by Tejada-Flores. A life-sized reproduction of her portrait from the Rivera mural will greet visitors as they enter the exhibition.

The art pieces will be original prints from the collections of Ms. Packard's son, the Mendocino Art Center, Graphic Arts Workshop, Achenbach Foundation, Oakland Museum, Crocker Museum, Albuquerque Museum, Kaiser Industries, the John Natsoulas Gallery and private collectors. Interpretive materials will come from her family and the Archives of American Art.

Project Staff

Rick Tejada-Flores, project director, is a documentary filmmaker whose works have been shown on PBS's American Masters and Independent Lens series and as one-off programs, the Sundance Channel, History en Español, Channel 4 UK; and screened at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History and the British Museum, as well at Sundance and many other festivals. His films include *Rivera In America*, *Orozco*, *Man of Fire* and *Jasper Johns, Ideas in Paint*. As an art student, he printed for Emmy Lou Packard and her husband Byron Randall in Mendocino, and remained a friend for the rest of her life. He filmed several interviews with her for his film *Rivera In America*, which aired on American Masters on PBS.

Robbin Henderson has curated numerous exhibitions at the Berkeley Art Center, where she served as Executive Director for 20 years; as well as the Alternative Museum, New York; Museum of Arts and Science, Macon, Georgia; Spirit Center for the Arts, Charlotte, North Carolina; Casa Gallery, San Francisco, La Peña, Berkeley and the Mission Cultural Center, San Francisco.

Terezita Romo is an art historian, and has served as chief curator of the Mexican Museum, Arts Director at the National Museum of Mexican American Art in Chicago and program officer for arts and culture at the San Francisco Foundation.

Robert Cherny is professor emeritus of history at San Francisco State University and author *Victor Arnautoff and the Politics of Art*. Arnautoff was another Rivera assistant and close friend of Ms. Packard.

Paul von Blum is Senior Lecturer in African American and Communications Studies at UCLA and author of *The Critical Vision, A History of Social and Political Art in the US*.

**San Francisco Arts Commission
Civic Art Collection**

Acc #: **1972.43.12**

Artist: **Emmy Lou Packard**

Title: ***Morning in the Valley***

Date: 1974

Medium: Linoleum Cut

Dimensions: 26 1/16 x 39 15/16 in.

Credit Line: Collection of the City and County of San Francisco;
Purchased by the San Francisco Art Commission for the
San Francisco General Hospital



Provenance: "Morning in the Valley" was an edition of 20 prints that the San Francisco Arts Commission commissioned Emmy Lou Packard to make for SF General Hospital's new Medical Center Building that opened in 1977. Ms. Packard was one of 30 artists commissioned in 1972 for \$1,000 for this project.



morning in the valley

12/20

Packard 1974