DESIGNED TO REPRESENT IDENTITY, FLAGS ARE NATIONAL UNITY AND LOADED SYMBOLS — USED TO EVOKE PRIDE AND PASSION, AS WELL AS EXCLUDE AND SOW DIVISION.

CHRISTOPHER PAYNE CAPTURES THE PROCESS INSIDE ONE OF THE WORLD'S OLDEST AND BIGGEST MAKERS

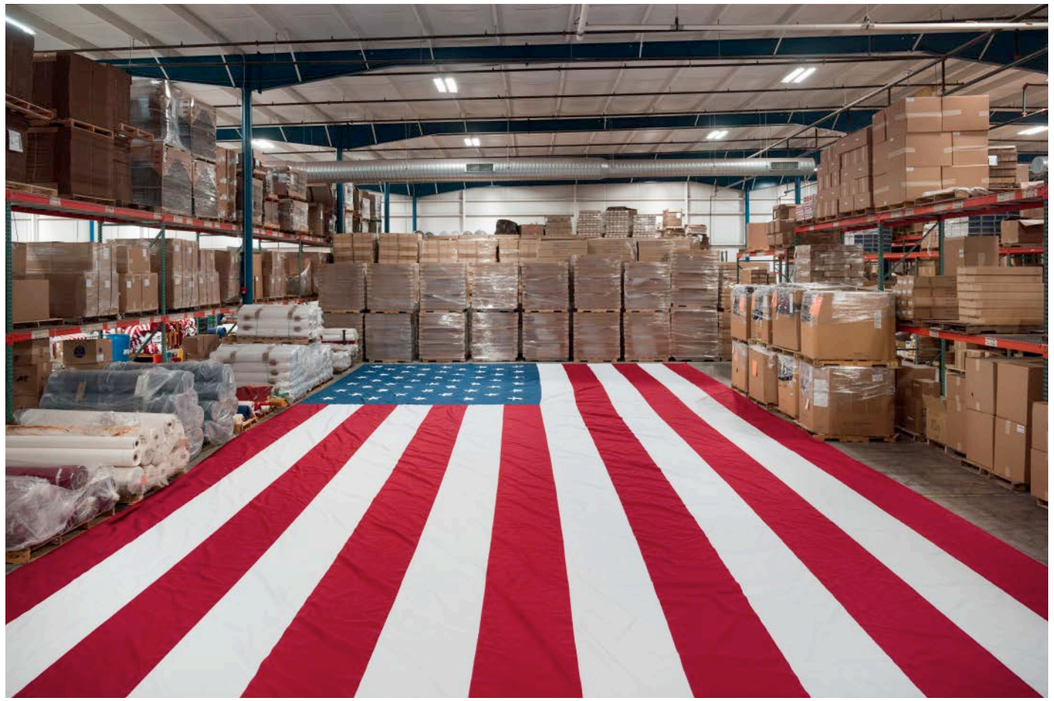
Held in the hand, a flag is a fairly simple piece of fabric, but flying in the wind it represents a nation's sovereignty, identity and its most noble ambitions. Founded in 1847 and family owned for six generations, Annin is the premier flag maker in the United States. Their flags have accompanied expeditions to the North and South Poles, were raised by marines at Iwo Jima in 1945, and flew to the moon with the Apollo astronauts. In addition to the US, Annin produces flags for many other countries, states, towns, institutions, companies, families and even custom designs for those popping the question, "Will you marry me?"

The scale of Annin's operation is astounding: the variety of flags being produced, the multitude of sizes and colours – the challenge of photographing such a vast and busy workplace is in finding moments of clarity in the visual chaos. — *Christopher Payne*

Previous spread: The embroidery machines employed by Annin produce hundreds of star fields simultaneously, using automatic specifications that match the star size to the flag size. The plant uses 250,000 cones of yarn to produce over 1 million embroidered star fields every year.

Opposite: A skilled seamstress hems a large flag with six rows of high-strength lock-stitching on the flag's fly end, the side that flies in the wind. This stitching reduces fraying due to weather wear and extends the flag's life.

Below: Annin's sizing ranges from hand-held 10cm by 15cm flags, up to nine metres by 18 metres. Here the largest size, in spun polyester, is laid out for folding and finishing. It takes six people to fold it and weighs 33kg. The time-tested open-weave material is engineered to let wind pass through, making it ideal for gales and flags that are flown daily.



Below: Hundreds of rolls of digitally printed international flags are prepared for finishing outside the sewing room.

Opposite: Kenyan flags moving through a machine that uses heat to remove creases and wrinkles in preparation for cutting.

Opposite: Polycotton US flags, 90cm by 150cm, being printed on a high-quality mass-production screen-printing machine. In addition to the more expensive embroidered US version, 50,000 smaller polycotton flags are produced each week to support sales. The highest volumes ship to customers between March and June ahead of the US flag season: Memorial Day, July 4th, and Labor Day. Here, the screen-printing machine runs at high speed under the watchful eye of skilled operators who are on hand to adjust as needed.

Below: Digitally printed custom flags are inspected on light tables before being cut and prepared for hemming, grommets, cording and other specialty finishes.

Print screens created for state, international and high-volume flags up to 1.5 metres by 2.4 metres in size are stored alphabetically in racks. Here, two workers stand with the POW/MIA (Prisoner of War/Missing in Action) flag that Annin was commissioned to design and has been producing since 1971. By federal law, the US and POW-MIA flags must fly together at military installations and most federal buildings.

The State of Ohio flag utilises two separate screens, one for each colour. The stars are printed over the blue background.

An operator inspects the ink laydown for the United Kingdom flag. The flat-bed screen-printing machine manufactures large-volume runs and provides high-quality ink penetration on textile fabrics, which is ideal for geometrical designs.