

For Immediate Release

Hung Liu

Rainbow: In Memory of Hung Liu

8 January – 5 March 2022

Opening Reception: Saturday, January 8th, 2:00 – 7:00pm

Proof of vaccination (or recent negative Covid test) and face masks required for entry

Walter Maciel Gallery will present a special series of work by Hung Liu documenting the grief and observations of her mother's death in 2011. The exhibition marks our sixth solo show of Liu's work and the first exhibition organized after her untimely death from pancreatic cancer on August 7, 2021. The exhibition will also include three video works and other mixed media paintings on ceramic tiles as well as a few older oil paintings in the back gallery.

Liu is known for paintings based on historical Chinese photographs as well as the Dustbowl and Depression era photographs of American documentary photographer Dorothea Lange. In late 2011 and early 2012, on the one-year anniversary of her mother's passing, Liu completed fifty-one small paintings during a forty-nine day mourning period, or roughly one painting a day. Initially working from photographs of objects left in her hospitalized mother's Beijing apartment, Liu painted such images as a bowl of uneaten dumplings, an empty chair, a toothbrush in a cup on the bathroom sink, and – among many other images – the telephone over which she and her mother had spoken daily for years.

A sequence of three paintings – rendered on the thirty-fourth day – represents the moment of her mother's death as a flat, green, electronic line on a bedside monitor; the very next painting is a thick, anguished smear of tar-black paint, followed by another in which a faint painted circle emerges. In quick succession, the circle morphs into the elliptical rims of lighted candles, one following another, each a close-up of a waxy, luminous orb adrift in a dark space, for the remaining several weeks until the artist ran out of canvases. The series entitled *To Live* was produced as a memorial for Liu's mother and is now presented as a memorial for her life celebrating her immense talent, momentous spirit and accomplished career as a painter.

Born in Maoist Communist China in 1948, Liu came of age in a society that would soon ban all aspects of her educated life during the early years of the Cultural Revolution. She was the granddaughter of a scholar and daughter of a teacher and learned early on of the importance of an enriched mind. Her father was a counter-revolutionary who was imprisoned in a labor camp for rebelling against the Communist regime. In 1968 at the young age of 20, Liu with separated from her family and sent to live with a peasant family in the countryside near Beijing to endure a life of hard labor. During this time and the early years that followed she secretly explored her interest in painting and would seek out solitary refuge where she could paint small plein air paintings which she kept in hiding. After returning to Beijing and being reunited with her family, Liu enrolled in the Beijing Teacher's College and later received an advanced degree from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing in 1981 where she created an important early mural painting in the cafeteria. In 1984 after waiting several years for her visa, Liu took her first flight at the age of 36 to come to California where she completed an MFA at the University of California, San Diego and studied with Allan Kaprow. In 1988 Liu was awarded a prestigious residency at Capp Street Project in San Francisco and immediately developed a fondness for the Bay

Area. Two years later she accepted a teaching position at Mills College in Oakland where she taught for nearly 25 years and influenced numerous artists.

Working from found photographs, Liu began her career in the US in the early 1990s creating energetic paintings with layered washes of paint many of which were included in important exhibitions at galleries and museums. In 1994 Liu exhibited *Jiu Jin Shan (Old Gold Mountain)* at the de Young Museum which consisted of an installation of 200,000 fortune cookies which engulfed a crossroads of railroad tracks as a homage to the Chinese immigrants who died while building the transcontinental railroad. Liu returned to China in 2008 and presented a retrospective show entitled *Tai Cang (Great Granary)* at Xin Beijing Art Gallery and she had her first solo gallery exhibition in China. In 2013 her traveling exhibition, *Summoning Ghosts: The Art of Hung Liu* was organized and debuted at the Oakland Museum of California and the show traveled to the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art in Kansas City and the Palm Springs Art Museum.

More recently in 2019, Liu was invited to do a show entitled *Hung Liu: Passer's by* consisting of important works at the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) in Beijing but the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Culture cancelled the show over objections to certain paintings just weeks before the opening date. Last summer just prior to her death, Liu opened the current exhibition, *Hung Liu: Golden Gate* at the de Young Museum in San Francisco which will be on view through March 13, 2022. In addition the National Portrait Gallery in Washington DC currently features Liu's work in the important exhibition, *Hung Liu: Portraits of Promised Lands* curated by Dorothy Moss that will be on view through May 22, 2022. She is the first Asian American woman to be featured in a solo show at the National Portrait Gallery.