

For Immediate Release

Hung Liu

Art Salon

20 September – 8 November 2025

Opening Reception: Saturday, September 20, 4:00 – 7:00pm

Walter Maciel Gallery is pleased to present a group of specially selected paintings by the late Chinese American artist, Hung Liu (1948–2021), whose pioneering work transformed historical moments captured in photographs into visual poetry using contemporary techniques and symbolic motifs from traditional Chinese culture. She layered these elements to create a conversation between past and present, showing how the lives of ordinary people are relevant today. By making her subjects monumental and combining them with symbols like insects, flowers and circles, she re-contextualized their stories to give them new meaning. The paintings are installed as an art salon with each powerful image occupying a wall creating an intimate space for conversation. This exhibition brings together rare pieces—one never exhibited publicly—offering an intimate look at Liu's deeply personal and politically resonant art practice.

Originally discovered in an antique store, the photograph used as reference for the painting, *Da Fan Che* captures a portrait of a traveling entertainer adorned in an elaborate headdress. The title translates to “tip-over cart,” referencing the headdress’s exaggerated ornamentation with an array of cut stones. Liu was captivated by the woman’s grace and resilience, frozen in a moment of poised performance despite a life of hardship. The painting is unique rendered from the heavily painted black lines and the saturated pigment dripping from the surface with the addition of linseed oil. Greenish-gray areas bleed through the surface, creating a striking portrait in black and white tones. Liu was satisfied by the painting at this stage and simply put it in her storage racks to revisit at a later date. As time went on, she liked it as is and opted not to add any additional paint.

In comparison, the painting *Relic IX* features a portrait of a prostitute positioned on the left side of the canvas in conversation with a large grasshopper to the right. The image of the young woman is depicted from a found photograph in a historical brochure used to promote her services. The large grasshopper symbolizes vulnerability and transience offering strength to the captive subject. The canvas contains an inserted wood panel with embedded Chinese characters painted in black on a red surface visible under a layer of resin. The character on the left represents “housewife”, 妇 with 帚 (broom) and 女 (female) on the right. Hung intentionally emphasized the subordinating gesture of “female” fusing beauty and sorrow.

Perhaps the most gripping painting in the exhibition is the large-format diptych entitled *Hua Gang (Flower Ridge)* which was initially made for the first solo exhibition at our gallery in 2006. The painting presents a harrowing image of Chinese prisoners of war captured by the Japanese during WWII. The figures are emaciated shown either naked or with their pants around their ankles. The sorrowful expression of agony, starvation and humiliation is softened by a field of painted cherry blossoms, a metaphor for resilience, memory and the return of life. Deeply haunting yet tender, the painting remains a powerful example of Liu's ability to capture the painful emotions of human torture while turning it into a beautifully rendered artwork.

This unique grouping offers a rare opportunity to experience Hung Liu's deeply personal and highly skilled paintings. Her artwork continues to reveal her intention to give dignity and awareness to those who were overlooked or forgotten.