Acclaimed artist Hung Liu memorializes the marginalized at the National Museum of Women in the Arts

Hung Liu: Making History exhibition marks the inaugural presentation of several new acquisitions

WASHINGTON—The National Museum of Women in Arts (NMWA) presents Hung Liu: Making History, opening October 21 after the museum’s two-year, top-to-bottom renovation. Chinese-born American artist Hung Liu (1948–2021) is best known for transforming her canvases and paper surfaces into memorial sites steeped in symbolism. This spotlight exhibition in the museum’s new fourth-floor galleries features nine paintings and works on paper, including several that have never been exhibited at NMWA. Hung Liu: Making History is on view through October 20, 2024.
Liu grew up during Mao Zedong’s Cultural Revolution in China, where she labored for several years as part of a forced agrarian re-education initiative before training as a painter. In 1984, she immigrated to California, where she continued her art education. In the 1990s, Liu came across a cache of historical black-and-white photographs of sex workers, child street acrobats, women laborers, soldiers and war refugees from pre-revolutionary China. These photographs became her source material: she combined the imagery with traditional Chinese motifs to create powerful portraits of these oft-forgotten individuals, whom she called “spirit ghosts.” Liu portrayed them as mythic figures on the grand scale of history painting.

*Hung Liu: Making History* highlights the many techniques that Liu used to create her poignant portraits, including collage, layered colors and motifs and screens of drip marks that she described as a “veil of tears.” The effect distorts her subjects, suggesting the blurring of one’s memories over time.

The exhibition marks the inaugural presentation of Liu’s major paintings *Summer with Cynical Fish* (2014) and *Winter with Cynical Fish* (2014), works acquired by the museum just prior to its recent two-year closure. In addition, a large-scale canvas featuring Liu’s signature expressive brushstrokes, evocative symbols and dazzling colors will be on view alongside works from the collection.

High-resolution images are available upon request.

*Hung Liu: Making History* is organized by the National Museum of Women in the Arts. The exhibition is generously supported by Stephanie Sale and the members of NMWA.

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