

TURNER CARROLL

Hung Liu

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

"When you see different sides you begin to realize how complex history is. One of our neighbors in Texas was a veteran; he told us that during the Korean War he flew over China to drop bombs, but when we went away he looked after our house. Neighbors become enemies, become friends again; it is a very strange thing. The complexity of history is not a one-sided story. There is no clear answer. I think you should leave the ambiguity there forever."

- Hung Liu Interview in her Oakland, California studio, March 2007

Social and artistic histories course through Hung Liu's work. With her confident athletic gestures of painting on canvas, her slick, alluring resin and oil pigment works, Hung Liu has for more than 30 years represented figures based on 19th and 20th century documentary photographs depicting the life and struggle of China. Her art training as a social realist along with her witness to a devastated homeland allow her the depth and capacity of emotion to paint with a fierce commitment and strength.

Almost all of Liu's painterly characters are primarily women workers—prostitutes, laborers, and acrobats, all of whom have navigated China's shifting cultural conditions. By surrounding her figures with traditional but symbolic elements, she blesses their past of torment and strife with a sense of honor and dignity. Liu's father was a Captain in the Nationalist Kuomintang and spent most of his life imprisoned by the Communists. The waves of Mao's Cultural Revolution washed through the youth culture of China and Hung Liu herself spent four years in a "re-education camp" working in rice fields seven days a week.

She was born in Changchun, China in 1948. After earning a BFA at the Beijing Teacher's College, Hung continued her studies at the Central Academy of Fine Arts. She emigrated from China to the US in 1984 to attend the University of California, San Diego, where she received an MFA. She currently lives in Oakland and is a professor emerita in the art department at Mills College. Her work has been exhibited in major museums throughout the world, including the Whitney Museum of Art, the Denver Museum of Art, Dallas Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum, Kemper Museum, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Museum of New Mexico, San Jose Museum of Art, LA County Museum, Belvedere Museum in Vienna, et al. She is the subject of three solo retrospective museum exhibitions in 2013, across the U.S. and there have been many books written about Hung Liu and her paintings. She is widely considered one of the top female contemporary artists working today. She and her husband, curator Jeff Kelley, own land in Galisteo, New Mexico, and hope to reside there someday soon.