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# Hung Liu

## 1948

Hung Liu was born February 17th (January 8th on the Chinese calendar, Year of the Rat) in Changchun, China. Changchun had been the capital city for the Japanese puppet dynasty of the exiled "Playboy" Emperor Pu Yi.

Changchun is defended by the Nationalist Army (the Kuomintang) of Chang Kai-shek from the advance of Communist forces led by Lin Biao and Mao Zedong. Liu's father, Xia Peng, is a captain in the Kuomintang army. Starvation and panic ensue after months under siege, despite attempts by American planes to drop food and supplies into the city.

In September, the family flees the city looking for food, crossing over into Communist territory. Liu's father is detained by communist troops at a checkpoint outside Changchun. She will not see him again until 1994.

Seeking refuge, the remaining family - Liu, her mother, aunt, uncle and grandparents - make their way to Jilin, a nearby city and then to a village in the Manchurian countryside where the name "Liu" predominated.

Changchun falls to the Communists in October. Soon after, the family returns to Changchun, "the dead city."

## 1954

Liu begins school at a Kindergarten for teachers' children. Her mother, Liu ZongGuang, is a middle school teacher.

## 1955

Liu begins elementary school.

## 1957

Mao Zedong initiates the "Great Leap Forward," an attempt to catch up with the West in agricultural and industrial production.

### **1959**

Liu, age eleven, decides impulsively at the Changchun train station to accompany her aunt, Liu ZongYu, to Beijing (where her aunt had lived since 1956). Her mother allows her to go with only "the clothes on her back."

### **1960**

Liu's grandparents and mother follow her to Beijing, where they will permanently reside together.

A mass famine, the result of Mao's disastrous "Great Leap Forward," grips the nation.

### **1961**

Because of high exam scores, Liu enters a special "experimental" girls' boarding school in Beijing, the Girls Middle School Attached to Peking Normal University. Her schoolmates include the daughters of Deng Xiaoping and Liu Shao Qi, as well as children of other high Party officials. (Mao's daughters had attended several years earlier.) Liu remains, performing at the top of her class, until 1966.

### **1962**

The famine begins to ebb in the cities. Chinese/Soviet relations deteriorate. Liu's grandfather - a scholar of the monasteries of Mount Qian in Manchuria - dies.

### **1966**

As Liu is about to graduate from high school, the Cultural Revolution (which will continue for ten years) begins. Millions of youthful Red Guards are unleashed by Mao in an effort to purge Chinese society of Western, "counter-revolutionary" influences.

Schools close. Liu is unable to receive her diploma.

Liu's aunt, Liu ZongYu, has her head shaved in public for having joined the Nationalist Party during the 1920's.

Mao decrees free train travel for young people. Although not a Red Guard, Liu rides the trains throughout China: to Xinjiang, Guangzhou, Harbin, Dalian, Shanghai, and Tianjin.

### **1968**

Liu is sent for proletarian "re-education" among the peasants in the countryside. There, she works in rice and wheat fields seven days a week for four years. She also photographs and draws portraits of local farmers and their families.

## **1972**

Schools begin to reopen. Liu enters the Revolutionary Entertainment Department of Beijing Teachers' College to study art and art education.

Nixon arrives in China.

## **1975**

Liu graduates and begins teaching art at the Jingshan School, an elite Beijing school modeled after the Russian system (first grade through tenth.)

Asked to teach children's art on national television, Liu gives weekly lessons from the studios of the Central China Television station, attaining an unexpected fame (and receiving numerous written proposals of marriage). Her program, *How to Draw and Paint*, lasts several years.

## **1976**

Zhou EnLai dies, Liu is among thousands who take wreaths of paper flowers to Tianenmen Square, nearly covering it. By the next morning, the flowers have been swept away by the authorities.

Liu travels to northern China with a group of school art teachers. There, she experiences the great Tang Shan earthquake in which perhaps a million people were killed.

Mao Zedong dies. His body lies in state, and Liu is among the millions who pass by in procession.

The Gang of Four, including Mao's widow, Jiang Qing, is arrested.

## **1977**

At age twenty-nine, Liu marries an astronomer. They separate within a year.

## **1978**

Liu gives birth to a son, Ling Chen. Deng Xiaoping emerges as the Paramount Leader

of China. The "Open Door Policy" toward the West is established.

### **1979**

After taking national entrance exams, Liu is accepted by the two leading art schools in China: The Central Academy of Arts and Crafts and the Central Academy of Fine Arts. She decides to attend the latter, majoring in mural painting.

Liu travels to the famous Buddhist cave murals at Dunhuang, in the Gobi Desert along the Silk Road. During her several weeks stay, she falls ill and nearly dies, perhaps from drinking local water. She is transported back to Beijing, where she recovers after several months.

Liu's grandmother, Wang JuShou, dies in the family's Beijing apartment.

### **1980**

Liu returns to Dunhuang, where she studies and copies the Buddhist cave murals for forty days. She also visits various famous religious shrines throughout China.

Liu begins work on *Music of the Great Earth*, a graduation mural project designed for the Foreign Students' Dining Hall of the Central Academy of Fine Arts.

She applies to the University of California, San Diego, for admission to graduate school in the Visual Arts Department.

Liu divorces her husband (divorces were still uncommon in China).

### **1981**

Liu completes *Music of the Great Earth*, and begins teaching at the Central Academy.

She is accepted to the University of California, San Diego, for the fall quarter, but her bid for a passport is refused by the Chinese government.

The University of California, San Diego, holds her application open.

### **1982**

Liu studies traditional calligraphy and stamp-making from Niu Jun, an aging scholar and Peking Opera playwright. She continues for three years. She continues teaching at the Central Academy of Fine Arts.

### **1984**

Liu gets a limited passport for temporary travel to Hong Kong in the hope that it will be

easier to get from there to the United States. While in Hong Kong, she receives word from the Chinese Cultural Ministry that her request for a passport has been granted, and she returns to Beijing.

On October 26, Liu boards a China Air 747 in Beijing and departs for San Francisco. At the airport she bids farewell to her mother, aunt, and son. It is the first time she's ever been on an airplane. She arrives at San Francisco International Airport with two suitcases and \$20, spending \$1 to rent a luggage cart before flying on to San Diego.

Liu begins her graduate studies at the Visual Arts Department of UCSD. Halloween is the first American party she attends.

At UCSD, Liu meets Moira Roth, Allan Kaprow, Eleanor and David Antin, Sheldon Nodelman, Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison, Manny Farber, and Patricia Patterson, as well as fellow graduate students Lorna Simpson, Christine Tamblyn, Hal Fisher, and Jeff Kelley (her future husband).

## **1985**

Liu participates in making a "dumpster" environment and in several Happening-type events with Allan Kaprow.

She travels around the western states with Kelley, and has a residency at the Sun Valley Center for the Arts and Humanities in Idaho. In November, she has her first one-person exhibition at the Sheppard Gallery, University of Nevada, Reno, where she uses the whole space for a mural-installation based on the ancient grotto caves of Dunhuang.

## **1986**

Liu visits New York and its museums, seeing important works of Western art for the first time.

In the spring, she completes a mural, *Up and Tao*, in a UCSD stairwell. In the summer, she marries Kelley at a friend's house in San Antonio, Texas. Her son, accompanied by her mother and aunt, arrive in San Diego and live with her throughout the fall.

At year's end, Liu has her graduate exhibition of variously sized white boxes and standing screens painted with traditional Chinese cloud forms. The family moves to Arlington, Texas, where Kelley takes a teaching job at the University of Texas at Arlington.

## **1987**

Liu teaches a Chinese art history course at the University of Texas at Arlington. She

also works as an artist-in-residence for the public schools of east Texas.

She paints at home in a "family room" studio, and has several Dallas/Fort Worth area exhibitions and installations.

Liu's mother and aunt return to Beijing. Her son, Ling Chen, remains.

## **1988**

Liu spends the summer as a resident artist at the Capp Street Project in San Francisco. She produces a mural, *Reading Room*, for the community room of Chinese for Affirmative Action in Chinatown, and creates an installation with paintings, *Resident Alien*, the culmination of her research into the history of Chinese immigration to California.

She completes *Where is Mao?*, an installation of 1,000 felt cut-outs of Mao's profile, each with a fortune cookie on top, at the Southwestern College Art Gallery in Chula Vista, California.

## **1989**

In the spring, students in Beijing begin assembling in Tiananmen Square, resulting on June 4th, in their forced removal by the People's Liberation Army. These events serve as inspiration for Liu, who borrows an old, turn-of-the-century photograph of a Chinese woman whose feet were bound (from friend and fellow artist Jim Pomeroy) and completes the painting *Goddess of Love, Goddess of Liberty*.

She receives her first National Endowment for the Arts Painting Fellowship and, in December, has a debut exhibition of paintings in New York.

Liu is offered a teaching position in the Art Department at the University of North Texas, Denton, Texas.

## **1990**

In the spring, Liu is offered a position with the Art Department of Mills College, in Oakland, California. Before moving from Texas to California, she travels throughout Europe, visiting the Venice Biennale, where Robert Rauschenberg, who was being honored at the Russian Pavillion, signs his name on her Chinese passport, offering her "a passport to the art world."

Liu begins teaching at Mills College.

## **1991**

Liu receives her second National Endowment for the Arts Painting Fellowship and begins showing at the Rena Bransten Gallery in San Francisco and the Bernice Steinbaum Gallery in New York City.

She returns to China for the first time since leaving, and discovers a trove of old turn-of-the-century photographs of Chinese prostitutes which she begins using as references for her paintings.

With her son, Liu becomes a U.S. citizen.

## **1992**

Liu completes *Map No. 33*, a major installation/mural project for the Moscone Convention Center in San Francisco.

## **1993**

Liu participates in the *43rd Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting* at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

She travels again to China in search of more archival photographs.

## **1994**

Liu participates in *Asia/America: Identities in Contemporary Asian American Art* at the Asia Society in New York City.

She also completes *Jiu Jin Shan* (Old Gold Mountain), and installation of 200,000 fortune cookies at the M.H. De Young Memorial Museum, San Francisco, California.

She learns that her father, whom she hasn't known since infancy, is still alive and living on a rural work farm for elderly inmates near Nanjing, where he has lived for many years. By coincidence she travels there on Father's Day to meet him, and learns that he had been imprisoned on and off since 1948.

## **1995**

Liu serves on the last National Endowment for the Arts Painting Fellowship panel.

She receives tenure from Mills College.

## **1996**

Liu participates in *American Kaleidoscope: Art at The Close Of This Century*, at the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, in Washington D.C.

Xia Peng, Liu's father, dies.

Ling Chen goes to college.

Liu turns forty-eight in the "Year of the Rat." Her year. In Chinese mythology, every twelve-year cycle brings a life-changing event. At her "Year of the Rat" celebration dinner, Liu reflects upon how her life has changed at twelve-year intervals: how at twelve she moved to Beijing; how at twenty-four the Cultural Revolution ended, she left the countryside, and went to college; how at thirty-six she immigrated to the United States; and how at forty-eight -- with her father's death, her son's leaving home, her inclusion in a Tokyo exhibition as an "American" artist, and the beginning of plans by The College of Wooster Art Museum for her ten-year survey - she can finally look back in amazement.