

EDUCATOR GUIDE

Story Theme: Paint x3
Subject: Hung Liu
Discipline: Visual Arts

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Artist Hung Liu reflecting on her work.
Still image from SPARK story, February 2004.

SECTION I - OVERVIEW

EPISODE THEME

Painting x3

SUBJECT

Hung Liu

GRADE RANGES

K-12 & Post-secondary

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Visual Arts & Language Arts

OBJECTIVE

To help students understand the development of personal works of art and their relationship to broader social themes and ideas, abstract concepts, and the history of art, through looking at, creating, talking and writing about visual artworks

STORY SYNOPSIS

SPARK checks in on Chinese-born painter Hung Liu as she works on a new series based on old photographs from the time of Mao's Cultural Revolution.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

- To introduce students to history painting and to help them understand contemporary history painting in an historical context
- To inspire students to explore their own visual language to represent their lives, histories, and memories
- To encourage appreciation of contemporary painting techniques
- To provoke consideration of issues of freedom and creativity in the US as compared to other countries, particularly China during the Cultural Revolution

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

- Group oral discussion, review and analysis, including peer review and aesthetic valuing
- Teacher-guided instruction, including demonstration and guidance
- Hands-on individual projects in which students work independently
- Hands-on group projects in which students assist and support one another
- Critical reflection on personal expressions and how they are seen and received by others

EQUIPMENT NEEDED

- SPARK story about painter Hung Liu on VHS or DVD and related equipment
- Computer with Internet access, navigation software, speakers and a sound card, printer

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Access to libraries with up-to-date collections of periodicals, books, and research papers
- Access to other examples of the Cultural Revolution in China, such as posters, flyers, books, pamphlets, etc. in books, in museums or historical societies, or on the Internet
- Pencils, pens, and paper
- Old photographs

INTELLIGENCES ADDRESSED

- Bodily-Kinesthetic - control of one's own body, control in handling objects
- Intrapersonal - awareness of one's own feelings, emotions, goals, motivations
- Spatial - ability to manipulate and create mental images in order to solve problems
- Logical-Mathematical - ability to detect patterns, reason deductively, think logically



See more information on
[Multiple Intelligences](http://www.kqed.org/spark/education) at
www.kqed.org/spark/education.

SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT

ARTIST PROFILE

San Francisco painter Hung Liu combines Western and Chinese traditions to create larger than life images of everyday people that have been lost in the sweep of history. SPARK visits Liu in her studio as she works on a new series of canvases for an upcoming exhibition in New York City.

Born in China in the 1940s, Liu came of age during Chairman Mao Tse Tung's Cultural Revolution. As a young woman, Liu was sent to labor in a remote village and learn a distorted account of Chinese history as part of her "re-education." Four years later, she trained as an artist in Beijing, where she learned to paint in the Social Realist style so that she would be able to serve the state by making colossal mural paintings of Mao and other prominent members of the Communist party. After years of working as an artist and teacher in China, Liu immigrated to the United States in 1984 and began making paintings informed by a wider perspective on her nation's history. Her work was enhanced when, during a 1990 visit to China, Liu discovered several hundred photographs from the time of the Cultural Revolution which have formed a basis for much of her work since. Personal photos from this era are rare since families often destroyed images that might be used as evidence that they were not proletarians.

Many of these images are extremely rare portraits of prostitutes, made in limited numbers for distribution to patrons. Liu's latest series monumentalizes these anonymous young women by depicting them in a style usually reserved for historical figures. Her canvases are rendered in a photorealist mode that looks back to her work for the Communist party, yet they are populated by individuals that are the object, rather than the subject of history. The photorealism of the works is further tempered by Liu's technique of diluting her paint with linseed oil, which then is dripped onto

the surface, blurring and distorting the portrait. The painting becomes akin to a memory image, which cannot claim to be objective, but fades and changes over time.

Liu received a bachelor's degree in education at the Beijing Teacher's college before studying mural painting at Beijing's Central Academy of Fine Art. In 1986 she earned an MFA from the University of California, San Diego. Liu has received numerous awards, including two painting fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally in such institutions as the Smithsonian Institution, the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, the National Museum of American Art, and the Walker Center. She currently resides in Oakland and is a Professor of Visual Arts at Mills College.



The face of an anonymous woman comes to life in one of Hung Liu's painting from historical photographs - *Visage #3* (2005). Still image from SPARK story, February 2005.

THE BIG PICTURE

Hung Liu's work combines the Western tradition of "history painting"--the representation of important figures and events from history--with the Communist photorealist style of representing

political figures. Both of these forms of painting have historically been used to propagate the beliefs and values of those in power. Liu usurps the usual intention of these traditions, employing the techniques typically used to commemorate or celebrate figures of political or historical importance to highlight those who have been marginalized by society and denied political representation.

In the West, history painters painted subjects from mythological or biblical sources, though usually in secular contexts in the service of contemporary allegories. This style was particularly popular from the mid-seventeenth to the end of the nineteenth centuries, when it was considered by the arts academies in Europe to be the highest form of painting due to its highly realistic style and philosophical intentions. History painting was followed in importance by genre painting (scenes from everyday life) and landscape painting, with still life at the bottom of the list.



Jacques-Louis David, Oath of the Horatii, 1784.

History painting may cover a range of subjects, from historical events to mythological or biblical topics, though usually as allegories in the service of contemporary secular contexts. From the seventeenth to the end of the nineteenth centuries, history painting was considered by the arts academies in Europe to be at the top of the hierarchy of painting, followed by genre painting (the depiction of scenes from everyday life), and landscape, with still life at the bottom of the list.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, history painting was often executed in a neo-classical style, as in Jacques-Louis David's well known 1784 painting Oath of the Horatii. The painting depicts the Horatii brothers, who are called

on to combat the Curiatii in order to defend Rome and avoid a full scale war. Though all three will be killed, they boldly rise to the challenge without fear for their lives. Painted during the unrest just prior to the French Revolution, the canvas uses classical subject matter and poses in order to suggest a contemporary moral about civic responsibility. The painting is rendered in the formal Neo-classical style; the figures, realistically rendered, are posed like actors on a stage and placed in an austere architectural setting. Many of these characteristics would later be adopted in Stalin's official Communist style, including the style's realism and use of gesture to suggest clear identifiable meaning.

Though history painting of this kind remained popular in 19th century Europe, the upheavals of the early 20th century challenged its dominance. During the Soviet Revolution of 1918, history painting was rejected in favor of "non-objective," abstract painting. The Soviet revolutionaries felt that the traditional means of representing history privileged leaders and imperialist expansion and therefore was poorly suited to represent the spirit of the revolution. In its place the Soviets tried to re-invent the visual language used to represent historical events. In the early years of the revolution they used abstract, geometrical compositions to depict the events and spirit of the new Soviet state, as in El Lissitzky's 1919 poster Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge.

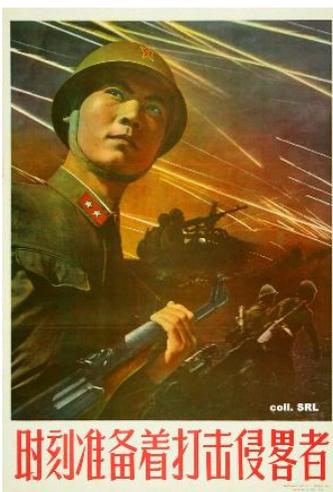


El Lissitzky, Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge, 1919.

When Stalin came to power in the 1930s, he quickly put an end to non-objective painting and made photorealism the official style for all state

propaganda, which was then adopted by Mao Tse Tung in Communist China in the 1950s. The style was regularly used in outright glorifications of the leader, in allegories of the people's support for him, and the celebration of work as examples of an individual's contribution to the success of the state. In the illustrated, unattributed poster below, a man is contented as he valiantly fights for his country as bullets fly past him. Since state artists were obliged to produce these works at an enormous scale, they regularly worked from photographs, which would be divided into grids, then reproduced as large scale murals.

Liu's training in this type of political propaganda painting informs her work in the today, which also reproduces small photographic images on a large scale. The staid composure and stillness of the subjects of Liu's paintings resemble the old photographic portraits from China the artist uses as source material, attesting to the remarkable similarity of early photographic conventions in the West and the East. The intense colors and symbols (fruits, animals, Chinese characters, etc.) connect Liu's iconography with a number of pictorial traditions, including Western history painting and Chinese landscape and commemorative portraiture painting. In the case of both Western history painting and Chinese landscape painting, symbols were included to extend particular morals or values to viewers or were included to represent the values possessed by the people represented in the painting or those who commissioned it – the patrons.



Unattributed Chinese propaganda poster, c. 1950s.

SECTION III – RESOURCES

TEXTS & ARTICLES

Hung, Liu. Hung Liu: 16 October - 20 November 1999. New York: Steinbaum Krauss Gallery, 1999.

Hung, Liu. Hung Liu: November 5, 1995-January 7, 1996. Norfolk, VA: Chrysler Museum of Art, 1995.

Hung, Liu. Hung Liu: The Year of the Dog, 1994 = Liu Hung, I Chiu Chiu Erh. New York: Steinbaum Krauss Gallery, 1994.

Jiang, Ji-Li. Red Scarf Girl: A Memoir of the Cultural Revolution. New York: HarperTrophy, 1998.

Snow, Edgar. Red Star Over China. New York: Grove Press, 1968.

Xing, Lu. Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: The Impact on Chinese Thought, Culture, and Communication. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2004.

Yuan, Gao. Born Red: A Chronicle of the Cultural Revolution. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987.

WEB SITES

Hung Liu's Web site, including a bio, images, articles and links <http://www.kelliu.com>

Web pages dedicated to Hung Liu at the Rena Bransten Gallery
<http://www.renabranstengallery.com/liu.html>

A Web site with many examples of Maoist photorealist propaganda images
<http://debrisson.free.fr/maoism.html>

Online Museum of Non-Objective Painting
<http://artnetweb.com/abstraction/nonobj.html>

A basic history of modern China and the Cultural Revolution designed for high school students from Thinkquest
<http://library.thinkquest.org/26469/cultural-revolution>

An article giving basic information on Chairman Mao's Cultural Revolution from the Chaos project at the University of Maryland
<http://www-chaos.umd.edu/history/prc3.html>

BAY AREA FIELD TRIPS

Moscone Convention Center
747 Howard Street
San Francisco CA 94103-3118

Hung Liu's installation Map No. 33 (1992) - Moscone North, accessible from the corner of Mission and 3rd Streets

Trillium Press
91 Park Lane
Brisbane, CA 94005
United States
415.468.8166
<http://www.trilliumpress.com>

Rena Bransten Gallery
77 Geary Street (btwn Kearny & Grant Streets)
San Francisco, CA 94108
415.982.3292
<http://www.renabranstengallery.com>

San Jose Museum of Art
110 S Market Street
San Jose, CA 95113
408.271.6840
<http://www.sjmusart.org>

De Young Museum
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco
Golden Gate Park at 50 Hagiwara Tea Garden Drive
24-Hour Hotline - 415.863.3330
Switchboard - 415.750.3600
<http://www.thinker.org>
(NOTE: The new De Young museum will open to the public on October 15, 2005.)

Oakland Museum
1000 Oak Street
Oakland, California 94607
510.238.2200
<http://www.museumca.org>

Paulson Press
1318 Tenth Street
Berkeley, California 94710
<http://www.paulsonpress.com>

SECTION IV – VOCABULARY

VOCABULARY WORDS AND CONCEPTS IN THE SPARK STORY

Cast Resin

To form plastics into a particular shape by pouring into a mold any of numerous physically similar polymerized synthetics or chemically modified natural resins and other components.

Excavate

To expose or uncover by (or as if by) digging.

Improvise

To invent, compose, or perform with little or no preparation.

Mao Tse Tung

Mao (1893-1976) was one of the most powerful leaders who ever lived. He was Chairman of the Chinese People's Republic and of the Chinese Communist Party, and transformed the political and economic system in China according to his brand of revolutionary Marxist ideology. The Cultural Revolution was a part of this transformative process resulting in widespread repression and death.

Media

The materials used in a specific artistic technique.

Memorial

Serving as a remembrance of a person or an event; commemorative

Mural

A very large image, such as a painting or enlarged photograph, applied directly to a wall or ceiling

Peasants

Rural land workers; in the Communist China of Chairman Mao, peasants were seen as a distinct class of worker counter posed to industrial workers in the city and glorified as crucial to revolutionary success

Printmaking

The artistic design and manufacture of prints, such as woodcuts or silk-screens

Propaganda

Biased information, ideas, or doctrines propagated for a particular purpose that is often politically motivated.

Spirit

The vital principle or animating force within living beings

Technique

Method of achieving a purpose or manner of execution, through skill or craft, in painting

Visage

The face or facial expression of a person; countenance

SECTION V – ENGAGING WITH SPARK

STANDARDS-BASED ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

Photo Excavation

Initiate a conversation with students about why Hung Liu quotes poet Stanley Kunitz – *“I have lived many lives, some of them my own.”* Show a selection of old photographs and ask students if the images feel familiar at all, or what similarities they can draw between their own lives and the apparent lives of the people in the photos. Students will then choose one of the photographs and write a creative personal history about the person(s) in the photo. To get started, ask the following questions:

- ❖ What is going on in the photo?
- ❖ What is the subject’s background, family, age, occupation, etc.?
- ❖ Who is behind the camera?
- ❖ Why does the subject no longer have possession of the photo?

Consider Hung Liu’s quote about how her paintings are created: *“The way I create the image is stroke-by-stroke. I try to look into every single detail, look into the surface, try to excavate beneath the surface. What’s the students’ goal will be to “excavate” the history of the subject of the photograph they choose.*

Photo Renovation

After viewing Hung Liu’s story, initiate a discussion about Liu’s quote at the end of the Spark segment: *“In a way, the painting becomes a memorial site for lost memory that is, to me, both celebration and also mourning.”*

- ❖ What does she mean when she says her paintings are “a memorial site for lost memory”?
- ❖ How do Liu’s paintings both alter and preserve the original “spirit” of the photographs she uses?

Ask students to select a photograph to remake. The original image can be of any subject they choose. They will alter the photograph and create a new “scene” or setting in which to re-contextualize the subject. They can use a cut-out of the subject, or the whole photograph, but the original must be incorporated into the new picture they create. Using paper collaged, paints, markers, or any other visual arts materials, students will use their chosen photograph as a basis for creating a new art piece that attempts to preserve and amplify the spirit of the original photograph.

Historical Portrait Examination

Show students slides or photos of famous portraits, then have them split up into small groups. Each group will choose one of the portraits to examine and describe, including specific details about the props, dress, and decorative elements, color, mood, and settings used in the images. Ask students to focus on identifying symbols that are indicative of the portrait sitter’s world.

How is the subject represented in the image? Does it look like it was the subject’s choice to be portrayed in that manner, or the artist’s choice?

Is the subject holding an object that implies something about their life or their occupation?

What other symbols are included in the portrait, and what might they represent?

Have the class reconvene and present their ideas to the rest of the class. Continue the discussion about portraits, and ask if the students in the audience agree with the group’s presented ideas.

Some examples are: Andy Warhol’s *Marilyn Monroe*, Franz Hals’ *Mallebabbe*, Francisco Goya’s *Teresa Sureda*, Annie Liebovitz’s *Muhammed Ali*, and Jacques-Louis David’s *Napoleon in his Study*.

Historical Figure Mural

Initiate a discussion about recognizable historical figures (Examples: Martin Luther King Jr., Cesar Chavez, Abraham Lincoln) and ask students to brainstorm about why these figures are significant in American History. Then, as a class, choose one figure that the students connect with most and would like to commemorate in an art piece. Have students split up in to two groups – one group will research text related to the chosen historical figure, and the other group will develop illustrations to accompany the text. Have each group present their ideas to the rest of the class, then work together to design a theme for a large mural piece including text and illustrations related to the historical figure.

Students must decide on a medium, or combination of mediums for the mural (painting, drawing, collage), as well as a location. The mural can be done on butcher paper and then displayed in the school. As an additional activity, hold an unveiling ceremony once the mural is completed and hung.

As a related field trip, visit Precita Eyes Mural Arts and Visitors Center in San Francisco.

Art and Propaganda

In the story, you learned about how Hung Liu was a worker artist in Communist China during the Cultural Revolution. In the Peoples Republic of China traditional Chinese painting was criticized and banned during this period because the Communist Party sought to eradicate all vestiges of tradition in order to make way for the new society and its beliefs. Following the lead of the Soviets, realist painting was considered to be the most suitable for the new social order. “Worker artists” were directed to make images in the manner of Soviet Socialist Realism, an ideology enforced by the Soviet State as the official standard for art and literature based on the principle that the arts should glorify the political and social ideals of communism. In the paintings, political leaders and communist ideas were idealized. In support of this concept consider a number of books and Web sites including Chinese propaganda posters. Here is an example:<http://www.iisg.nl/~landsberger>

Discuss the posters in relation to Hung Liu’s paintings in the SPARK story. Talk about how Hung Liu was engaged as a “worker artist,” forced to produce billboard signs and posters for the Communist Party as part of the Cultural Revolution. Discuss the concept of propaganda and how propaganda in art played a major role in campaigns designed to mobilize people in support of the Revolution. Look at the posters and think about the images.

- ❖ What are the images trying to say?
- ❖ How do they communicate (through color, imagery, text)?
- ❖ How is the image propaganda?
- ❖ Are social values expressed in Classical Chinese landscapes? If so, what are they?
- ❖ How are Classical Chinese landscapes and Cultural Revolution posters different? Are they similar?

Propaganda

Challenge students to create their own propaganda poster. Begin by brainstorming as a group for possible propaganda themes or topics. Incite conversation about issues related to school or life that students feel strongly about changing. Then begin by brainstorming a list of objects, individuals, and words or slogans that would communicate about the issue(s).

RELATED STANDARDS

LANGUAGE ARTS

Grade 5 – Writing Strategies & Writing Applications

- 1.1 Create multiple-paragraph narrative compositions:
 - a. Establish and develop a situation or plot.
 - b. Describe the setting.
 - c. Present an ending.

2.1 Write narratives:

- a. Establish a plot, point of view, setting, and conflict.
- b. Show, rather than tell, the events of the story.

Grade 6 – Writing Strategies & Writing Applications

- 1.1 Choose the form of writing (e.g., personal letter, letter to the editor, review, poem, report, narrative) that best suits the intended purpose.

Grade 7 – Writing Strategies & Writing Applications

- 1.1 Create an organizational structure that balances all aspects of the composition and uses effective transitions between sentences to unify important ideas.
 - 1.2 Support all statements and claims with anecdotes, descriptions, facts and statistics, and specific examples.
- 1.4 Identify topics; ask and evaluate questions; and develop ideas leading to inquiry, investigation, and research.

2.1 Write fictional or autobiographical narratives

Grade 8 – Writing Strategies & Writing Applications

- 1.5 Achieve an effective balance between researched information and original ideas.
- 2.1 Write biographies, autobiographies, short stories, or narratives.
 - a. Relate a clear, coherent incident, event, or situation by using well-chosen details.
 - b. Reveal the significance of, or the writer's attitude about, the subject.
 - c. Employ narrative and descriptive strategies (e.g., relevant dialogue, specific action, physical description, background description, comparison or contrast of characters).

RELATED STANDARDS

VISUAL ARTS

Grades 7 & 8

- 2.0 Creative Expression
- 2.3 Develop skill in using mixed media while guided by a selected principle of design.
- 2.5 Interpret reality and fantasy in original two-dimensional and three-dimensional works of art.
 - 2.6 Create an original work of art, using film, photography, computer graphics, or video.
- 4.0 Aesthetic Valuing
- 4.1 Explain the intent of a personal work of art and draw possible parallels between it and the work of a recognized artist.

Grades 9 – 12, proficient

1.0 Artistic Perception

- 1.1 Identify and use the principles of design to discuss, analyze, and write about visual aspects in the environment and in works of art, including their own.

3.0 Historical and Cultural Context

- 3.1 Identify similarities and differences in the purposes of art created in selected cultures.

For more information about SPARK and its educational content, including the Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the Web site at <http://www.kqed.org/spark/education>.



For more information about the California Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the CA Dept. of Education at

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/index.asp>