

# Art Teaches



## *Imperial Column by Hung Liu, Art Teaches Tour Transcript*

Hi, I'm Patti Barkin and I'm a volunteer Exhibition Interpreter here at the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art

I'm standing in the Chinese gallery, it's called the Soreng Gallery and it's been recently reinstalled with Myriad Treasures from our collection of Chinese Art.

Myriad means (many) sculptures, tapestries, paintings; things that are old, things that are new, there's many, many different items on display and you'll get to see the full gallery before we close today.

I want you to take a closer look at the painting behind me. It was done by Hung Liu, a Chinese-American artist.

She was born in China in 1948 and she later moved to the United States to get a masters of fine arts degree at the University of California, in San Diego.

What do you think is going on in this contemporary painting by Hung Liu? If you're in class and you can share your ideas with your classmates, we'll pause and you can do that now. If you are learning remotely, I would like you to take a pen and paper and write down 3 or 4 sentences of what you see in this painting.

We'll pause now to give you time to respond.

Hung Liu was born in China in 1948. When she was 18 years old, her life changed. There was a cultural revolution in China, starting in 1966 until 1976. She along with her family was sent to the countryside for re-education during this socio-political movement. She was already an artist and she worked then as a propaganda artist during the time of the revolution under Mao Zedong. Our JSMA Chinese gallery houses some of the propaganda art from that time period. Propaganda, these are mostly posters; it's a way of sharing information, especially of a biased or misleading nature. It's used to promote a particular cause or political point of view. The imagery she was taught to do was very realistic, it was full of happy mothers, and happy children and happy laborers and happy manufacturers. The truth was, it was really labor camps that were re-educating those folks from the cities.

So this piece, which is very contemporary, was completed in 2016 and is called *Imperial Column*. It combines many images from her memory of traditional China, with modern China. I see flying apsaras. These are angelic Buddhist figures. I also see flower petals. These she borrowed from old cave paintings. And I also see a lot of circles. She used the circle as a symbol to show time. Liu has put these circles into most of her paintings.

Why do you think a circle represents time? What other shape might you use to represent time?

Draw your shape and explain why you chose it in 2 or 3 sentences.

We'll pause now and give you time to respond.

Hung Liu built her modern style based on the social realist style that she had been taught while living in China.

Once she reached the United States, she loosened up her brush strokes and she broadened her subject matter to create colorful paintings with layered veils of dripping pigment.

When looking at the painting with its references to the past, its symbols and its drips, what do you see that references her memory of the past?

We'll pause again for you to respond.

Let's talk more about the symbols in this painting. Remember the apsaras? They are symbols of the spirit. Perhaps they are flying celestial beings representing either young or old, monks or laity. I think perhaps Hung Liu is remembering her past and brings these images into this modern painting to remind us of the strongly held beliefs of the Buddhists.

Mao Zedong wanted to erase those memories but Hung Liu is bringing it back as a symbol of the religion of the people. Another symbol we talked about was the circle and how it might represent time and the cycle of life. She uses this common symbol and adds the drippings. Perhaps she's making a statement about her freedom, about her ability to be imperfect. This would be the opposite of the propaganda pieces she was forced to paint during the Cultural Revolution.

The column itself is another symbol of the past, but holding on to it and holding on to those memories. What else do you see that are symbols of freedom?

For our closing activity, I want you to take your paints or crayons or markers, and draw or paint symbols of freedom. To make it a multimedia project, you might layer on things from nature or cut out items and add them to your piece.

Thanks for coming on our virtual tour of the JSMA. Remember to take time to finish your art project about symbols, and I hope to see you back at the museum soon!