

PASSAGES:

SCULPTURE BY
LIU SHIMING



JULY 6
through
AUGUST 18,
2022



Godwin-Ternbach Museum, Queens College (CUNY)



Portrait of Liu Shiming by Wang Shaojun

LIU SHIMING

Liu Shiming (1926-2010) was one of China's most illustrious sculptors and a member of the first generation of truly modern artists, schooled in ancient and traditional Chinese art, as well as exposed to Western artists Auguste Rodin and Henri Matisse. He began studying sculpture in his youth, then was admitted to the Beijing Fine Arts School (later known as the Central Academy of Fine Arts), where he trained with Wang Linyi and Hua Tianyou, part of the first generation to study in France.

After ten years of study and teaching, in 1961, Liu left the capital to reside in China's Central Plains, particularly Henan, and Baoding in Hebei, where he examined the lives of poor farmers and villagers going about their daily lives. During this period, he spent time in meditation and contemplation of his purpose as an artist and a human being.

In 1974, he moved back to Beijing where he worked at the National Museum of China for seven years restoring and replicating ancient artifacts from China's history.

In 1981, Liu Shiming's alma mater, the Central Academy of Fine Arts, welcomed him back to teach in the sculpture department. Here, he sculpted and fired almost 2,000 works of art over a twenty year period.

In 1998, an exhibition of his work was held at the Central Academy of Fine Arts Corridor Gallery, and the catalog, Liu Shiming's Works, was published. In 2005, another exhibition, "Local: Liu Shiming's Sculptures," and a symposium were held at the Central Academy of Fine Arts Sculpture Research Institute. In 2006, "Free Daisies: An Exhibition of Liu Shiming's Sculpture," and a symposium were held at the National Art Museum of China.

In May of 2010, Liu Shiming died at the age of eighty-four.

PASSAGES: Sculpture by Liu Shiming celebrates the art of noted sculptor, Liu Shiming (1926-2010), in a retrospective of works spanning six decades of artistic inquiry. *PASSAGES* brings to light one of China's first generation of truly modern sculptors, schooled in both ancient and traditional Chinese art and restoration techniques, and at the same time, influenced by Western artists such as Auguste Rodin and Henri Matisse. Liu Shiming's work successfully married these two disparate worlds. He was one of the first 20th century Chinese sculptors to emerge from the generation trained in traditional and folk techniques after the founding of the People's Republic, particularly Han dynasty folk clay sculpture traditions. Early in his career, Liu left Beijing to study the lives of working people in the provinces, hence the preponderance of representations of the quotidian – prosaic activities that might comprise our days such as shopping, fishing, bicycling, and parenting.

PASSAGES is divided into five themes that preoccupied Liu Shiming during his lifetime: Origins, Portraiture, Laboring, Children & Families, and Nature. A primal love of clay and its plastic qualities dominates these works, later cast in bronze for the exhibition. Direct observation from life informs his fluid drawings, created spontaneously on scraps of paper, backs of envelopes, spent calendar pages, and almost anything at hand. Liu's oeuvre is distinctly humanistic in matter-of-fact portraits of subjects in their most unguarded moments.

Modest, yet masterful, Liu's works are both unsentimental and universal. By merging folk techniques with modernist ideas about the human form, he created a completely new genre. This unique perspective brings a freshness and a lively dialogue to what sculpture can ultimately be.



ORIGINS



Cutting Through Mountains to Bring in Water

“

Cutting Through Mountains to Bring in Water was created during the energetic climate of the Great Leap Forward from 1958 to 1959. Nothing could affect my mood. At the time, “I’m Coming” was a popular folk song, which went: “There is no Jade Emperor! I am the Dragon King! I shout and the Mountains make way. I’m coming!” Inspired, I sculpted a man leaping from between two mountains. At the time, the traditional view at the Central Academy of Fine Arts was that sculptures should not represent environments; they should be focused on the figure. Pieces like Rodin’s *The Thinker* were considered true sculpture. However, I boldly broke with this convention.

”

Liu Shiming

“

In creating work around the intellectual re-education campaign, I deeply felt that true emotion could only be seen in the relationships between people at key moments. There is a deep empathy in my work, but my art is also a representation of myself and my colleagues. I observed and discovered forms in life with kindness and empathy, so I very easily found people, events, and forms that moved me. Source material for my work could appear anytime and anywhere.

”

Liu Shiming

Liu Tiehua was a noted Chinese printmaker who was a colleague of Liu Shiming in the Art Department at Kaifeng Normal Academy. The two men were sent down to the countryside for re-education.



Tiehua Going for Noodles

PORTRAITURE

LABORING



Wooden Raft on the Yangtze River

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In the late 1980s, boat people became an important subject in Liu's work. He created many works with boat people and farmers, with many different boats and a range of farming implements and utensils on the boats. I wonder: did Liu Shiming's numerous works featuring boats and boat people in addition to expressing what he saw and felt in real life, depict his realizations about life and rivers, progress and struggle? Otherwise, he would not have maintained a deep interest in the subject from the 1950s to his later years.

”

Yin Shuangxi, True Art: A Study of Liu Shiming's Sculpture

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You should look at life like a child does. When you take the perspective of an innocent child, all love and everything in life feels fresh and lovely.

”

Liu Shiming

Mengmeng is Liu Shiming's grandson and the beloved subject of many works.



Mengmeng

CHILDREN & FAMILIES

NATURE



Man with a Boat and Cormorants

“ One time, Liu was walking on an embankment and he saw a man trudging up the embankment with some difficulty. The man seemed to be carrying a wooden box on his shoulders, but it was actually two boxes connected by a wooden pole. The local people told Liu that it was a small boat. The boat carrier was a fisherman, and this scene stuck with him for many years. Later, he sculpted this boat carrier. I don't know why, but when I look at this work, I think of Millet's farmers.

”

Wu Jing, *My Old Friend Liu Shiming*

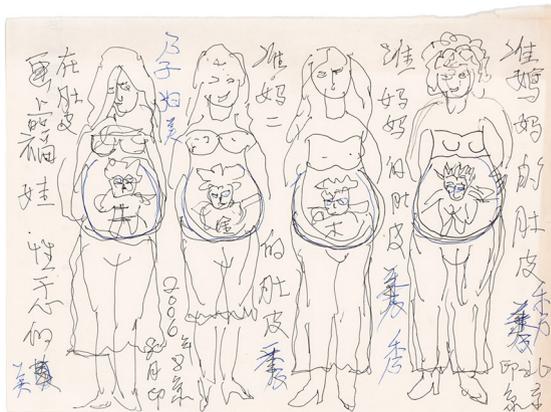
“

The opportunity to work on this exhibition allowed me to participate in a project that I never thought I would be a part of. It granted me the chance to work within a museum, working within a wonderful team to bring this exhibition to life. I got to learn about the inspirational artist Liu Shiming.

His ideas encourage me to find inspiration though my everyday life and the people I encounter day by day. His collection reminds me of the beauty within so-called unpolished work, where its true essence is the life and expression of the people. This internship gave me new skills and knowledge about a world that I knew very little about. Because of this opportunity, I am able to find a place to grow within the arts.

”

Angela Goh '23 (Brooklyn College, CUNY) - Summer 2022 Liu Shiming Scholars Fund intern



Beauty of pregnant women, Fuwa painted on the belly, sexy beauty, belly show of expectant mothers, impression of Beijing.

DRAWINGS



Clay maquette for Cutting Through Mountains to Bring in Water, 1958.

Artist Liu Shiming is depicted on the right.

Godwin-Ternbach Museum (GTM) is pleased to host the work of artist Liu Shiming this summer. This exhibition would not have been possible without the generous financial support of Mr. Liu Wei and the Liu Shiming Art Foundation. Special thanks go to Stephanie Straffi, Director of Individual Giving at Macaulay Honors College; Linda Liang, Director of Operations and Puiking Hui, Director of External Affairs at the Liu Shiming Art Foundation, for their unwavering support and enthusiasm for this exhibition. We extend our thanks to Stephanie Lee, museum operations assistant, Natalia Viteri, website designer, and Arnold Kanarvogel, chief preparator, for their fine work on the presentation of the exhibition. Lastly, we would like to thank Angela Goh, Brooklyn College (CUNY), GTM intern, and first recipient of the Liu Shiming Scholars Fund Grant, for her dedication and contributions to this exhibition.

Maria C. Pio and Louise Weinberg, GTM co-directors



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