

ASIAN ART MUSEUM
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For Asian Art & Culture
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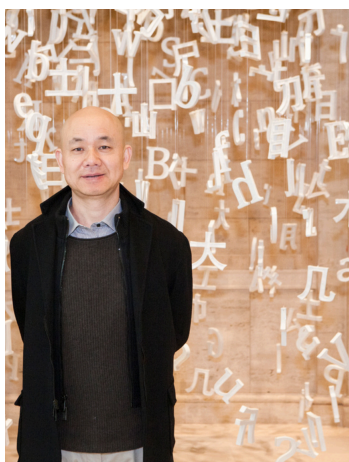
News



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LIU JIANHUA: COLLECTED LETTERS



Asian Art Museum celebrates 50th anniversary with major new installation by contemporary artist Liu Jianhua, a gift from the Society for Asian Art

SAN FRANCISCO, March 23, 2016 — As part of its 50th anniversary celebration, the Asian Art Museum has unveiled a major new installation by renowned contemporary artist Liu Jianhua. A gift from the Society for Asian Art entitled *Collected Letters*, the site-specific commission by the society on behalf of the museum is now on view in the second-floor Loggia.

Inspired by the museum building's original incarnation as the San Francisco Main Public Library, Liu has created a multi-ton installation composed of suspended, commingled white porcelain forms: the letters of the Roman alphabet and the radicals that make up Chinese characters.

For these *Collected Letters*, Liu designed bold typographical forms sculpted and fired in Jingdezhen, the centuries-old capital of Chinese porcelain production. Densely arranged on dangling strands in the museum's soaring classical Loggia, they both echo and deconstruct the wise maxims inscribed on the old library walls as well as the aphorisms painted onto the historic Chinese ceramics nearby, reminding visitors of the building's current and former lives.

"It's a study in the unity of differences. English and Chinese. Accessible and esoteric. Reverence for the past and exploration of the new," explains Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art, Karin Oen. "These forms can be seen as sculptural compositions in their own right. The beautiful illegibility of the piece is surprisingly refreshing to our modern eyes, which are so used to an overabundance of text."

At age fourteen, Liu Jianhua was accepted as an apprentice at the Jingdezhen Ceramics Factory, where he worked for the next eight years mastering the artisanal, technical, and practical aspects of the field. Liu is known for his deep connection to porcelain and for creating intriguing artworks comprised of conventional objects made strange by their scale, material, color or placement.

Liu's early work in porcelain included surreal renderings of female bodies, headless or limbless, reclining on fine dishes. Other installations involved masses of books, toys and everyday tools rendered in stark white porcelain. Arranged across floors, they evoke dystopian cityscapes; suspended from ceilings, they create floating worlds; assembled in otherwise predictable environments, their power is a ghost-like surprise.

"The assemblage here of white radicals and letters nods to the past while presenting tempting possibilities for as-of-yet-unwritten prose and poetry," adds Oen. "At the same

time, the simple beauty of fine porcelain serves as an alluring starting point for visitors to engage with the museum's ceramics collection, one of the most significant holdings of East Asian ceramic art in the world."

As an artist who emerged with the Chinese avant-garde in the 1980s, Liu Jianhua's contemporary work is included in the permanent collections of institutions such as The Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Shenzhen Art Museum; Guangdong Museum of Art; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Today Art Museum, Beijing; USC Pacific Asia Museum, Pasadena; and the Yuz Museum, Shanghai, and has also featured in the Asian Art Museum's 2010 *Shanghai* exhibition.

Contemporary art and programming key to Asian Art Museum's next 50 years

"*Collected Letters* is about giving new audiences memorable experiences with significant works of contemporary art in a meaningful, and maybe unexpected, way," says Asian Art Museum Director Jay Xu. "This installation furthers the museum's commitment to sparking conversations about what's next — in short, starting the next 50 years on the right note."

Through its ongoing commissioning and collecting of new contemporary works, the Asian Art Museum invites visitors to reflect on the living traditions of Asian art and cultures. To offer audiences fresh insights into contemporary art practices like Liu Jianhua's, the museum's multimedia and education teams will create videos of Liu discussing his process and inspiration for *Collected Letters* along with interviews in Chinese and English with visitors after experiencing the installation for the first time.

"On the occasion of this milestone, we're commemorating our time in this magnificent building and planning for our future here," says Linda Lei, president of the Society for Asian Art, which helped found the Asian Art Museum in the 1960s by bringing the celebrated collection of philanthropist Avery Brundage to San Francisco. "With *Collected Letters*, we wanted to honor the forward-looking spirit of the museum by connecting an ancient art form with what's happening in the world now."

ORGANIZATION

Collected Letters is organized by the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. This acquisition was made possible by the Society for Asian Art in honor of the Asian Art Museum's 50th Anniversary.

ABOUT THE ASIAN ART MUSEUM

The Asian Art Museum—Chong-Moon Lee Center for Asian Art and Culture is one of San Francisco's premier arts institutions and home to a world-renowned collection of more than 18,000 Asian art treasures spanning 6,000 years of history. Through rich art experiences, centered on historic and contemporary artworks, the museum unlocks the past for visitors, bringing it to life while serving as a catalyst for new art, new creativity and new thinking.

Information: 415.581.3500 or www.asianart.org

Location: 200 Larkin Street, San Francisco, CA 94102

Special Exhibition Admission: FREE for museum members and children (12 & under). On weekdays, \$20 for adults and \$15 for seniors (65 & over), youth (13–17) and college students (with ID). On weekends, \$30 for adults and \$25 for seniors (65 & over), youth (13–17) and college students (with ID). On Target First Free Sundays, \$10.

General Admission: FREE for museum members, \$15 for adults, \$10 for seniors (65+), college students with ID, and youths (13–17). FREE for children under 12 and SFUSD students with ID. General admission on Thursdays after 5 PM is \$5 for all visitors (except those under 12, SFUSD students, and museum members, who are always admitted FREE). General admission is FREE to all on Target First Free Sundays (the first Sunday of every month).

Don't miss a moment: #CollectedLetters