

GU Art Galleries Open Chinese Painting, GU Photography Exhibitions

By Ajani Stella, Academics Desk Editor

The Georgetown University Art Galleries launched two new student-curated exhibitions in the Edmund A. Walsh building Jan. 17, featuring paintings exploring communist China and photographs from university archives.

The Maria and Alberto de la Cruz Art Gallery exhibition, titled “Hung Liu: Happy and Gay,” presents large-scale paintings by Hung Liu, a Chinese-born American contemporary artist, that reimagine picture books created after the Chinese Civil War to instill core communist values into Chinese youth. The Spagnuolo Art Gallery installation, “& Loving: Photography from the Georgetown Collection,” includes 13 photographs from the Georgetown University Booth Family Center for Special Collections that center the idea of shared humanity.



Two new student-curated exhibitions featuring paintings exploring communist China and photographs from university archives launched in the Georgetown University Art Galleries in the Edmund A. Walsh building Jan. 17, which aims to examine how art reflects both contemporary issues and Georgetown's values. (Courtesy of Hung Liu Estate)

Graduate student curators worked with Dorothy Moss, director of the Hung Liu estate, to develop the de la Cruz exhibit while undergraduate student curators compiled the Spagnuolo exhibit under the direction of Ian Bourland, chair of the department of art and art history.

Bourland said the galleries' emphasis on student curation, which is unique to this season of exhibitions, bridges a shared interest in education and presenting art to the

community.

“This reflects the Georgetown University Art Galleries' position both as a leading cultural institution in the DMV and one enmeshed in a university context where teaching and learning are core goals,” Bourland wrote to The Hoya. “Our hope is that a show like “& Loving” also speaks to larger GU values of human engagement and care for the whole person, even as it resonates with an audience of both students and people from our wider community.”

Caroline McCann (CAS '25), one of the "& Loving" student curators, said her group sorted through about 3,000 photographs in the Booth collection and collaborated to find overlapping themes.

"A theme of loving and shared humanity started to emerge," McCann wrote to The Hoya. "Some of the original ideas we had were themes of shared passion, musicality and creativity, and connection, so after seeing the photos that made it into each exhibition pitch, as well as adding in some original favorites, we saw that they all had to do with loving — loving each other, a passion or a moment with another person."

McCann said curating the exhibit was a valuable learning experience that taught her how galleries and museums work.

"It was really exciting that we were the first class of undergraduate students to curate an exhibition, so I was very grateful to be a part of the process and to have the experience itself!" McCann wrote. "We really learned about everything from researching artists to choosing paint colors and frames!"

Jaynelle Hazard, director of the galleries, said the galleries aim to examine how art reflects both contemporary issues and Georgetown's values through exhibitions.

"Whether there's something going on globally or in the country, a topic that feels relevant to their work at that time, we think about the ways that the university as a whole can engage with the content of the artwork," Hazard told The Hoya. "Is there something relevant to the university at this time? Is there a body of work that's really going to help to establish the university as a contemporary arts leader?"

Erika Wisby (SFS '25), who attended the opening reception, said the vivid colors and depictions in Liu's work are captivating and present a different side of communist China.

"Visually the art is very compelling with the colors and everything, but it's just interesting to see communist China represented so vividly," Wisby told The Hoya. "I feel like a lot of times when you think of communism and learn about communist China, you think about suffering, poverty, things that draw the color out. But these takes on cartoons are really cool."

Emma McMorran (GRD '22), the exhibitions and public engagement manager of the galleries, said the galleries focus on artists and artwork from underrepresented backgrounds to highlight themes of social justice.

"Our larger mission is really to support artists of underrepresented backgrounds," McMorran said. "Over 90% of art in museum collections was made by white men, so modern museums and especially contemporary art galleries have the opportunity to really reach out and work with living artists, women artists and artists of color and support their careers."

Hazard said she hopes the exhibitions will prompt conversation among attendees and inspire new ways of thinking about social issues.

"Sparkling dialogue — that's the big piece. The galleries themselves serve as a hub for fostering conversation and dialogue around these important issues," Hazard said. "It's not only allowing someone to discover something new about an artist or discover an artist generally, but also hopefully they're walking away having learned something or had a different perspective on a topic."