

AFFIDAVIT OF TRANSLATION

I, undersigned, being duly sworn, depose and say that:

1. I certify that I am fully competent and literate in the English and Chinese languages.
2. I have accurately translated attached documents [Qian “Joss” Liao | Meandered Rebirth, A Survivor’s Expression Through Art] from Chinese to English.
3. The translation is completed, true and accurate, to the best of my knowledge, ability and belief.

By: 

Yifan He, 27 April 2023

Qian “Joss” Liao | Meandered Rebirth, A Survivor's Expression Through Art

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Sunflowers open their mouths and cry to heaven. Flocks of birds circle the sun.

A sentiment suspended between sorrow and relief, expressed in black ink and hasty brushstrokes, leaps between the imagery of plants, flowers and birds.

These are from the new works by the New York based artist Qian “Joss” Liao, who picked up her paintbrushes four years after taking a break from painting while focusing on glass-making.

"After being sexually assaulted by my art mentor when I was in high school, the thought of him makes my hands tremble every time I try to paint," Liao said, "because he taught me every painting technique."

Titled *Poetic Encounters*, this set of paintings came after Liao's difficult journey of healing herself.

In 2015, the summer she turned eighteen, Liao was sexually abused by a teacher she trusted and admired. Before she could process what had happened, she had arrived at her dream school Rhode Island School of Design.

The trauma prevented her from enjoying college life as her peers did. Although she was able to access mental health support in the United States, she had bad episodes frequently. Being in a foreign country, the language barrier and cultural differences made it difficult for her to find friends who could always be there for her.

Thankfully, Liao had glass-making to keep her company. This medium, glass, entered her life like a new friend, bold and passionate.

"When glass is hot, it acts like honey. It gives this honey texture that allows you to stretch it thin. But as soon as it cools down, glass becomes very fragile," Liao said, "This pair of contradicting characteristics gave me huge inspirations at the time."

With the work *Hanging in There*, Liao used the unique materiality of glass to express the extreme mental states she was experiencing.

The glass hanging down from the ceiling resembles an elongated human figure. A pair of glass-stained copper hooks nailed to the underside of the wall looks like a pair of broken limbs.

"I wanted to explore this concept of 'loss,' which feels like, to me, the pain of hara-kiri," Liao shared.

The piece took only a minute or two to make, according to Liao. She first poured the molten glass onto four copper hooks. Then, the hooks are pulled in all four directions by her and her studio partners. Before the temperature dropped to the solidification point, she cut off the glass near the copper hooks.

The work was inspired by a poster that Liao saw nearly every day in her dormitory at the college. On the poster, a cat was lying on a tree, and underneath the image wrote the phrase: hang in there.

"During my freshman year, this poster gave me a lot of courage to push through things," Liao said. "But then I slowly realized the violence in asking someone to hang in there. The phrase does not take into account difficult situations people might be in, especially for people like me with complex mental illnesses such as post-traumatic stress syndrome."

Liao used the slumping glass bending technique For the work *Clock on the Hill*. She heated a round piece of glass on top of nails in the kiln. When the kiln reached a certain temperature, the glass formed a soft, skin-like texture that collapsed in the middle. Where the nail was positioned, the slumping glass formed little hills. The work resembles a clock, and the clock hand at the center is of the shape of a dead tree.

"The hands stop every time they go over a hill, sometimes for a few seconds, sometimes for a few minutes, sometimes longer," Liao said.

But eventually, the motor would drive the hand on, leaving a trail of black oxidized copper on the glass dial.

"*Clock on the Hill* symbolizes my subjective experience of time as something uneven. For the past few years, every time I thought about the sexual abuse, I was thrown into a space isolated from the world, from reality, not knowing how long I would be in there, or

how long I would be in bed. Despite time flowing evenly in a forward direction, I was left behind, being constantly thrown back to that point in the past," she says.

The series of glass works, like vessels, held some of Liao's pain. In the process of making art, she felt the wound slowly healing.

Although Liao majored in glass, she decided to exhibit at her degree show, *Poetic Encounters*, the very first paintings she made after the incident.

"After four years of healing through using another medium to make art, I was able to pick up the paint brushes again even when painting reminds me of him (the teacher who violated her)," Liao said. "There are a lot of birds and flowers in the paintings, and for me, they represent a primitive livelihood. There is no difference between humans and animals and plants, they all want to live, to be nourished, to see the sunlight."

According to Liao, as she gradually confronted the pain through making art, she was able to put aside the specificities of personal memories and adopt universal imagery using more versatile mediums.

Liao turned to ceramics last year.

"Clay reminds me of Nuwa, the goddess from ancient Chinese mythology," Liao says. "Unlike the patriarchal mythologies, which usually have a strong misogynistic undertone, Nuwa presents a powerful female figure. The stories of Nuwa mending the sky and Nuwa creating human beings remind me of my creative process. I don't just use art as a means to mend my wounds, I also want to create life, through creating this bond that allows me to reach my audiences emotionally."

Tao Fu (Clay Sigil)

"Clay came out of the firing in a pale yellowish color, which looks like my skin. I see myself in clay," Liao said. "I'm figuring out how to take the story of an individual and work it into a collective narrative."

Looking back on her experience, Liao realized she was not just making art to heal. She is also working on, maybe outside of what is conventionally deemed as art, promoting social changes that protect women from bigotry and harm.

A fifteen-year-long case of sexual assault at a Beijing art high school came to light last September, which alarmed us with another regulatory gray zone, like in workplaces,

where women are subject to harm. Immediately after the incident came to light, government authorities overhauled the art industry.

"The time studying at an art tutoring institute can be a very delicate period of time for the student," Liao said. "Regardless of their age, the student is in a pre-adolescence state of mind, where they project a lot of self-worth and noble ideals into art and literature. Middle-aged tutors may take advantage of such passionate yet innocent, at times naive, state of mind and exploit their students sexually."

Adding to the age difference and different level of maturity is the unbalanced power relationships between a teacher/mentor and an art student. This is more complex than workplace harassment, Liao added, "art teachers in high schools determine the future of their students."

Liao now can openly discuss the traumatic experience that pulled her down mentally like a black hole. Making art gives her a way to find her core which creates its own gravity.

"For me at the time, I thought this person was the only one who could resonate with me spiritually," Liao said. "Now I understand that I can find such resonance within the right community, with many people. I can even resonate with some painters who have long passed away. To be understood is not of scarcity."

Artist Profile:

Qian "Joss" Liao is a Chinese artist based in Brooklyn, New York whose work has been exhibited extensively in China, the United States and Europe. Liao held her solo exhibition *A Place to Land* in Rhode Island in 2020. She had her solo exhibition *Poetic Encounters* in Brooklyn, New York, 2022, sharing her experience, through artistic expressions, of being a survivor of sexual abuse and of exploring growth as an immigrant. In 2016, Liao had her solo exhibition in Shanghai *Trigger*, which was well received by the public, with coverage in mainstream media such as Sohu and Yachang, and renowned curators and critics speaking at the opening. Using her survivor experience as a starting point, Liao founded Blumi Jewels, which participated in several fairs on the East Coast of the United States and are favored among consumers, achieving greater commercial success compared to similar brands. Liao attributes her business success to her unique approach that uses art as a medium to heal herself and others from trauma.