

# FROM ABSTRACTION TO ACTIVISM: HARRY LUM'S LATER WORKS, 2000-2020



**FEBRUARY 3 – MARCH 6, 2025**  
**RECEPTION: TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 4-6PM**

**HYDE ART GALLERY  
GROSSMONT COLLEGE**





# INTRODUCTION

This catalog was produced on the occasion of the late career retrospective of Harry Lum at Grossmont College, February–March 2025.

The exhibition celebrates the remarkable career of Harry Lum (1930–2022), a gifted artist, teacher, and thinker whose work spanned decades, mediums, and themes. Lum’s art explored the intersections of history, politics, and human nature, reflecting his deep curiosity and sharp intellect.

From elegant abstractions to searing political commentary, Lum’s work challenged conventions, invited introspection, and often provoked difficult but necessary conversations. His commitment to his craft and his students left a lasting impact not only on the art world but also on those fortunate enough to learn from his insights.

This retrospective focuses on key themes and periods in Lum’s work, including his satirical critiques of economic and political systems, as well as his more lyrical, meditative pieces. With an essay by his former student and acclaimed artist, Carole Soborovski, this catalog offers a glimpse into the profound legacy of an artist whose voice remains as resonant as ever.

“Some of Lum’s most provocative and humorous pieces emerged during the later portion of his life, from 2000 to 2019. Lum’s sharp intellect attempted to explain the horrors and cruelty of the new millennium. Many of his paintings from this period were both satirical and indignant.”

– Karen Hjalmarson

In the final two decades of his life, Lum turned his focus toward some of the most pressing issues of the modern era. His work was both a mirror and a critique, reflecting society’s triumphs and failings with his signature blend of intellect, wit, and compassion. From dissecting the hubris of Wall Street in *Cyndics of Wall St.* to confronting the moral failures of Abu Ghraib, Lum’s paintings remain as relevant today as they were at the time of their creation.

Harry Lum will be remembered not only for his extraordinary contributions as an artist but also for his profound influence as an educator. Generations of students were inspired by his insight, humor, and encouragement, carrying forward his ethos of curiosity and critical engagement.

This catalog is both a tribute to his life's work and an invitation to new audiences to discover the brilliance of an artist who dared to explore the most profound aspects of humanity, culture, and art.



# A REMEMBRANCE

BY CAROLE SOBOROVSKI

*"I did what I wanted to do all my life"*

*-Harry Lum*

It seems rather far-fetched that my teacher, Mr. Lum, would one day become known to me as Harry. Back in 1977, I entered his classroom at Grossmont Community College already knowing that I wanted to be an artist. Mr. Lum commanded the classroom with military order. Promptly at the top of the hour, roll call would begin. Always by last name first. He would pause between each name and unflinchingly look up from the roster straight at the student who was being called. If you did not answer with a firm "Here!" he would say, "I can't hear you." If you were not seated the moment your name was called, then you were late. So, it was clear to me from the start that rules matter.

The course Beginning Composition covered negative space, directional lines, color arrangements, and value scales, and we had to do all this using powdered charcoal which was a notoriously difficult medium to control. In addition to our own compositions, we analyzed the works of old masters such as Vermeer, as well as the likes of Paul Klee.

Mr. Lum's critiques involved laying all the drawings in a line down the middle of the classroom. The students would line up on either side, defending their own work and explaining why one drawing might be better than the other in terms of the parameters that were laid out by Mr. Lum. He would then move the drawings up or down the line by using his foot. The drawings that made it to the top of the line were the ones that not only accomplished the lesson's task but also embodied a personal or cultural statement. Mr. Lum enjoyed our class because there were a few of us that would raise our voices and argue over why one drawing was better than the other. He would smile and, through clenched teeth, release sinister chuckles when the class got all worked up. Years later, he told me that he liked that we were so passionate about the work.



I took another course or two with Mr. Lum and utilized the classrooms during open studio time. Sometimes, I would show him drawings that I did outside of class, and he responded favorably. One day, I was getting coffee at the vending machine that Mr. Lum would frequent, and he noticed that I was upset. He asked me what was wrong, and I told him I had broken up with my fiancé. He was dismayed and asked, "Why were you engaged?" I said that I liked the companionship, and he said, "That's what dogs are for! You should get yourself a dog." And so it was around that time, that Mr. Lum offered guidance about my future.

Mr. Lum had me over to his studio. I recall the smell of fiberglass resin and boxes of Crackerjack that he would eat while working. He had me over to his apartment and showed me how to cook a French chicken dish, and we listened to classical music. He offered me advice on continuing my education in the Bay Area. He met my parents and told them that I had talent and that I should continue my studies. After I graduated from Grossmont, Mr. Lum stopped calling me by my last name and started calling me Carole, and he asked me to call him Harry.

I packed my bags and drove up to San Francisco, where I roomed with two of Harry's other former students. I went to San Francisco State and then to California College of Art for my BFA.

While I was in the Bay Area we would write on occasion. One time, Harry sent me back my letter with all my spelling mistakes corrected in red ink-ouch! Social niceties were not Harry's strong suit, but I always appreciated his input no matter what. Harry would visit me and I always would see him any time I was in San Diego. I helped him paint the home that he built in Harbison Canyon. We would make dumplings, drink, and talk about art. I loved his fiberglass pieces and his light boxes, as they reminded me of the light and landscape around his home there. He loved nature and grew lots of bamboo and jasmine around his home. His desire to have space and live in the wilderness stemmed from the oppression he felt growing up in a cramped tenement with his brothers and parents in San Francisco's Chinatown.



In the early '80s, I moved to NYC and continued my studies, earning my MFA at Hunter College. I started exhibiting, and when I earned enough money, Harry gave me the confidence I needed to buy an apartment and take the leap into home ownership. He visited me in New York, gave me away at my wedding, and even helped me through a grueling divorce that lasted longer than the marriage. He was a good friend, mentor, and, ultimately, a father figure to me.

After retirement, Harry purchased a piece of land outside Nevada City. Again, he built his house from scratch. His home was filled with art, books, and music. He had a vast array of knowledge in history, philosophy, and the classics. He kept up to date on current events by reading *Le Monde*, *Scientific America*, and *The New Yorker*. Harry loved cooking and fixing obscure items around the house, like his record player heads and car engines, or he would climbing trees with his chainsaw or cutting down shrubs with his machete, but his primary interest was in making art.

He gave me much advice on my career, but for as long as I knew him, he did not follow his own advice. Harry once told me that when he was a student at Berkeley looking for an apartment, the landlords did not want to rent to him because he was Chinese. Did shocking experiences like these make Harry feel like he would be automatically rejected if he were to approach gallery dealers with his work? Was he an idealist romantically envisioning himself as a scholarly Chinese recluse? Or was he a practical guy calculating that there are only so many hours in a day to do what he loves most, making art? I am guessing it is a combination of all of the above.

Over a period of 45 years, Harry and I kept in touch on a weekly, sometimes daily, basis. Looking back on the day when I first walked into Mr. Lum's class, I feel so fortunate that our relationship evolved to the point where I could call him Harry. He played such a profound role in my life. In last conversation, he told me that he had no regrets. He lived the life he wanted to live and made his art. Thank you, Harry, for everything that you gave and for what your art continues to give.



## ABOUT CAROLE SEBOROVSKI

Carole Seborovski was born in San Diego, California. She first attended Grossmont Community College and then received her BFA from the California College of the Arts in 1982. She continued her studies at the New York Studio School and received her MFA in painting from Hunter College in 1987. Her work has been widely exhibited in galleries and museums both nationally and internationally since 1984. She has had solo shows at Galerie Karsten Greve in Paris, Cologne, and Milan. Haines Gallery in San Francisco, Mitchell-Innes & Nash in New York City, Locks Gallery in Philadelphia, and John Berggruen Gallery in San Francisco, among others.

Seborovski's work is represented in numerous museum collections including the Museum of Modern Art, NY, Metropolitan Museum, Whitney Museum, Brooklyn Museum, San Francisco Museum of Art, National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C., and the Museo Cantonale d'Arte in Lugano, Switzerland, among others.





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**STATUE OF ABU GHRAIB**  
A/C 70X54





COLUMBIA, GEM OF WALL ST  
A/C 54X70





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DECEMBER 29, 1890 A.D. MANIFEST DESTINY AT WOUNDED KNEE  
A/C 54X70





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**CYNDICS OF WALL ST**  
A/C 54X70





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**HALT MEMORIAM**  
WATERCOLOR 30X22





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**GOING TO CAMP**  
A/C 69.75X54





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HEARTLAND MORGUE  
A/C 54X70





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**HEARTLAND REMOVAL**  
A/C 70X54.25





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**INTERMENT LITTLE GIRL**  
A/C 70X54





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**JIM CROW PICK-AXE**  
A/C 54X70





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KKK  
A/C 70X54





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LYNCHING, MARION, INDIANA, 1930  
A/C 70X54





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**MAN IN ELECTRIC CHAIR**  
A/C 42X37.75





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**MARTYRI**  
A/C 42X38





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**MACHE AUF: OPEN IT**  
WATERCOLOR 24.5X22.5



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**MIGRANT MOTHER, CHILDREN**  
A/C 70X54





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**RESTRAINING GRANDMA**  
A/C 70X54.25





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**SOUTH TOWER BLUE ESCAPE**  
A/C 46X58





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**SOUTH TOWER - EXTERIOR**  
A/C 48X68

# PRICING

## **ABU GHRAIB\***

*c. 2015, Acrylic On Canvas, 70 x 54 in*  
Price \$35,000

## **COLUMBIA, GEM OF WALL ST.**

*Acrylic On Canvas, 54 x 70 in*  
Price \$35,000

## **CYNDICS OF WALL ST.**

*2019, Acrylic On Canvas, 54 x 70 in*  
Price \$35,000

## **DECEMBER 29, 1890 A.D. MANIFEST DESTINY AT WOUNDED KNEE**

*ND, Acrylic On Canvas, 54 x 70 in*  
Price \$35,000

## **GOING TO CAMP\***

*2000's, Acrylic On Canvas, 69.75 x 54 in*  
Price \$35,000

## **HALT MEMORIAM\***

*Watercolor & Silver Pigment on Watercolor Paper,  
30 x 22 in*  
Price \$6,000

## **HEARTLAND MORGUE**

*2000's, Acrylic On Canvas, 54 x 70 in*  
Price \$35,000

## **HEARTLAND REMOVAL**

*2000's, Acrylic On Canvas, 70 x 54.25 in*  
Price \$35,000

## **INTERMENT - LITTLE GIRL\***

*c. 2020, Acrylic On Canvas, 70 x 54 in*  
Price \$35,000

## **JIM CROW PICK-AXE**

*2000's, Acrylic On Canvas, 54 x 70 in*  
Price \$35,000

## **KKK\***

*2000's, Acrylic On Canvas, 70 x 54 in*  
Price \$35,000

## **LYNCHING - MARION, INDIANA, 1930**

*2000's, Acrylic On Canvas, 70 x 54 in*  
Price \$35,000

## **MACHE AUF: OPEN IT\***

*Watercolor & Silver Pigment on Paper, 24.5 x 22.5 in*  
Price \$6,200

## **MAN IN ELECTRIC CHAIR\***

*2000's, Acrylic On Canvas, 42 x 37.75 in*  
Price \$15,000

## **MARTYR I**

*2010, Acrylic On Canvas, 42 x 38 in*  
Price \$15,000

## **MIGRANT MOTHER, CHILDREN\***

*c. 2020, Acrylic On Canvas, 70 x 54 in*  
Price \$35,000

## **RESTRAINING GRANDMA\***

*c. 2020, Acrylic On Canvas, 70 x 54.25 in*  
Price \$35,000

## **SOUTH TOWER - BLUE ESCAPE**

*c. 2001, Acrylic On Canvas, 46 x 58 in*  
Price \$50,000

## **SOUTH TOWER - EXTERIOR**

*c. 2001, Acrylic On Canvas, 48 x 68 in*  
Price \$30,000







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# HARRY LUM

Harry Lum was born in 1930 in Walnut Creek, California, the fourth son of Chinese immigrant parents. Harry's family moved to San Francisco in 1933 and he spent his youth in the city's vibrant Chinatown. Harry graduated from Lowell High School and enrolled at University of California at Berkeley. Encountering films about the Holocaust in one of his classes, he eventually gave up chemistry to study art, receiving his BA in 1953 and an MA in 1954. Influenced by an older generation of the Bay Area Figurative painters, like Paul Wonner and Richard Diebenkorn, Harry saw figuration as a way to explore what it meant to be human.

After a stint in the Army, he was awarded a Fulbright scholarship to study in Paris from 1959 to 1960. Studying the drawings of the great French artist, Jean-Baptist Camille Corot, led Harry to experiment with abstraction and upon his return, while he took up teaching at U.C. Berkeley and the Richmond Art Center from 1961-1972. In 1972, he moved to San Diego where he was offered a full-time position at Grossmont College in El Cajon. Harry taught at Grossmont until 1995 when he retired and moved to the small Northern California town of Nevada City.

Harry strongly identified as an artist and educator, putting the bulk of his energy into those two activities. Still, over his six-decade painting career, Harry exhibited regularly on the West Coast, mounting solo exhibitions at Mill College Art Museum, Oakland, San Jose Museum of Art, San Diego Museum of Art, Richmond Art Center, Grossmont College, El Cajon, and at the Berkeley Gallery and Dana Reich Gallery, in San Francisco. He was also included in many group exhibitions at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Oakland Museum of California, Mills College Art Museum, Richmond Art Center, Palace of Legion of Honor and De Young Museums, San Francisco, San Diego Museum of Art, and Gallery Paule Anglim in San Francisco.

Harry passed away in 2022, just shy of his 92nd birthday.



## **CONTACT**

Harry Lum's work is available for loan to exhibitions and for acquisition by collectors, galleries, and institutions.

For inquiries regarding exhibitions, acquisitions, or loan requests, please contact us using the information below. We are committed to preserving and promoting Harry Lum's artistic legacy and would be delighted to collaborate with museums, galleries, and collectors worldwide.

Contact Information: [INFO@HARRYLUMART.COM](mailto:INFO@HARRYLUMART.COM)

We look forward to assisting you in discovering and sharing the art of Harry Lum.