

Hung Liu & Michael McClure: *Deer Boy*



Hung Liu - *Deer Boy*, 2009
 Artist's book w/ custom book box and prayer flag
 31.75 x 13 x 1.25 in.
 Edition of 20

Hung Liu's *Deer Boy*, an artist's book combining images by Liu with poetry by Michael McClure, was inspired by the artist's encounters with two fallen deer. In November of 2008, Liu was taking a morning walk in the Oakland hills when she saw a prone deer; the artist stopped and borrowed her husband's cell phone to capture the image. She walked around the animal, photographing it from various angles. Later, while making drawings and paintings based on these photographs, the artist says she had the sense that the deer was flying or dancing, as if caught in the performance of a sequence of ethereal movements.

"Inside the Dunhuang grottoes," says Liu, "there are ancient Buddhist murals, always depicting *apsaras* – flying angels without wings. From a certain angle, the deer looked just like those *apsaras*: caught in mid-flight, ascending to heaven."

In May of 2009, Liu found a baby deer lying dead on the road. She carefully placed its body in the back of her car and brought it to her studio, where she again took photographs. Liu used these images as studies for works on paper and canvas, capturing the animal's fragile, helpless form as its spirit drifted to a different plane of existence.

In March, poet Michael McClure came to novelist Yiyun Li's book signing at Liu's studio and saw one of Liu's paintings of the deer. Lingering after the signing was over, McClure told Liu that her deer painting and Cy Twombly's *Yellow Pansies* were the two most beautifully moving paintings he had seen recently. Liu told the poet of her deer encounters and discovered that McClure was similarly moved by fallen deer; indeed, he told her, upon coming across their inanimate figures, the poet always immediately recited a Buddhist *darani* prayer.



Liu and McClure decided to create a project inspired by this common sensitivity and brought the idea to Magnolia Editions director Donald Farnsworth, also in attendance. A week later, the three reconvened at Magnolia, where they began developing a collaborative artist's book. McClure and Liu also revisited the spot where Liu found the first deer and the poet chanted as Liu circled the glade, now overgrown with wildflowers. Liu's painting and this experience inspired McClure to write the eponymous poem, *Deer Boy*.



Deer Boy was designed by Donald Farnsworth and Hung Liu and printed by Tallulah Terryll on Arches Cover rag paper using permanent, UV-cured acrylic ink. Each page is numbered with a drawing by Liu of flower petals; the number of petals represents the numerical sequence of the page. *Deer Boy* is housed in a custom book box designed by Donald Farnsworth and Andrew Rottner and created by Andrew Rottner at Magnolia Editions. Each box is covered in Canapetta book cloth and printed with the book's title in seal script, an ancient calligraphic script, and a stylized deer taken from a rubbing of a Chinese eave tile.



Top to bottom: Prayer flag with printed imagery by Hung Liu; detail from book; detail of print on interior of box.

Deer Boy also contains a multicolored prayer flag of Chinese silk, printed with drawings by Liu of Buddha, deer, and the artist's trademark painted circle – a reference to the *enso*, one of the most profound subjects in Zen Buddhist practice, suggesting the void, completeness, emptiness, enlightenment, and endless cycling, encompassing everything and nothing at once.

Deer Boy is published by Magnolia Editions in a limited edition of 20 numbered copies, 6 artist's proofs, 1 trial proof, and 2 printer's proofs. For pricing and availability, please contact Era Farnsworth at Magnolia Editions. ■