



Z.S. Liang

Returning to the Source



Trading with the Blackfeet, Montana Territory, 1860, oil, 12 x 19 in.

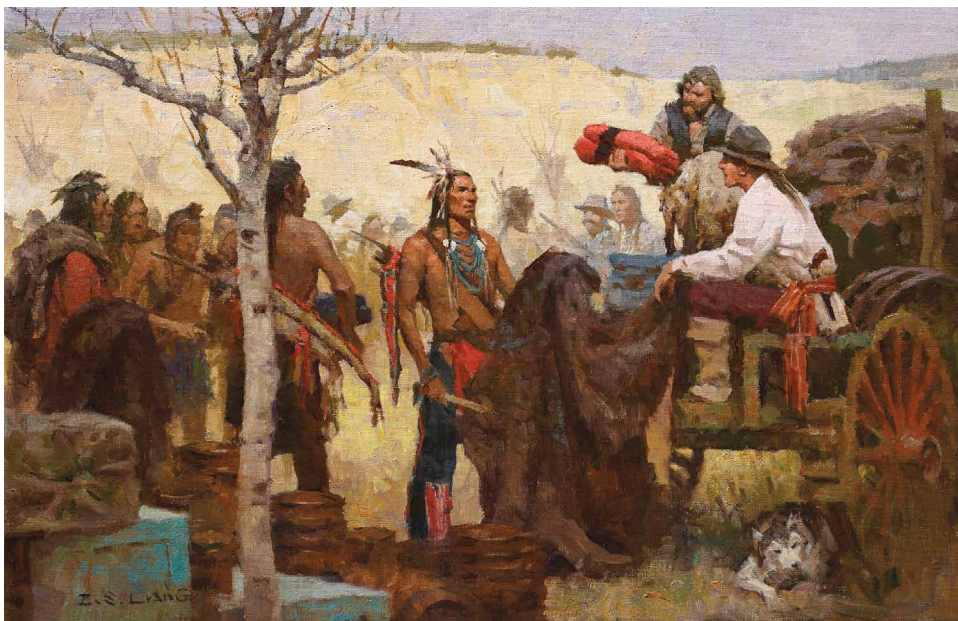
For more than a dozen years, California painter Z.S. Liang has held onto a treasure trove of studies completed as reference for larger paintings and, in some cases, for paintings that never materialized. A new show at Legacy Gallery is bringing those works out of his studio to collectors for the first time.

More importantly, Liang has returned

to each of the studies and added new paint, including fleshing out stories, refining compositions, adding features to the faces and including even more authentic detail in the scenes, which is one of the hallmarks of his work.

"These works, some newly painted and others revisited over the years, provide a rare glimpse into the artist's process and the foundation of his larger canvases," gallery owner Brad

Richardson says. "Each painting carries a story that unfolds through composition, value and color. These studies are not mere preliminaries, they are complete works that reveal Liang's pursuit of visual storytelling...At the core of Liang's art is the desire to tell stories that touch the heart without words. His dedication to research—immersing himself in books, museums and conversations with Native friends



Joe Kipp Trader Missouri River, 1879, oil, 14 x 21 ½ in.



Red Cloud's Soldiers, oil, 13 x 20 in.

and scholars—forms the bedrock of each composition. He often notes that a single sentence from an oral history can spark the vision for an entire canvas.”

The gallery notes that many of the works “resonate with humanity and depth.” Those qualities can be seen in works such as *Joe Kipp Trader Missouri River, 1879* and *Trading with the Blackfeet, Montana Territory, 1860*, which shows a bustling trading scene with dozens of figures. Liang’s complex composition rewards deeper examination if viewers start following the eyelines of the subjects. Additionally, a rifle, tree limbs, an open blanket and a dog’s back create diagonal lines that add to Liang’s delicate arrangement. He points out the far right side of the painting, where a young girl helps an elderly woman who wishes to come see the commotion of the traders. In another part of the painting, a Native



Tales of Counting Coup, oil, 14 x 20 in.

American man seated next to a pile of red blankets stares fondly at a seated woman in the foreground. “The young man is looking at a woman, the most beautiful woman in the tribe,” he says. “I like to

create these stories in the paintings.”

During the lead-up to the show, Liang remembers looking at all the pieces in his studio and trying to decide what he wanted to do to each one. He realized



Riding Hard to Reclaim Their Land, oil, 12 x 18 in.



Memorial to Chief Red Crow, oil, 15 x 19 in.

the studies were already nearly done, but they needed that extra refinement he's known to put into his work. "I enjoy those very teeny tiny brushstrokes. If you look at these pieces, each face has an expression that is important. It was strange for me because some of these were originally painted long ago, and then I repainted them with these new details," he says. "It was very important for me to add these special details."

When it comes to his process, Liang says that these color studies are an important part of his studio. "Most of my

paintings are done in four or five steps. I usually find a paintable story from a book or history, and once I get the story and imagine how it would work, I do a rough version and then do the modeling. I come back to my studio and do a more detailed drawing and then a color study, which is what you see here," he says. "This is all to serve the final big painting. The color study gives me a chance to create the power of the painting. And the color allows me to make it stronger. I like working in saturated color, which allows me to make a focal point that I can give

more attention if I want to."

Other works in the show include *Memorial to Chief Red Crow*, showing a grouping of men sitting on a hide near a buffalo skull; *Riding Hard to Reclaim Their Land*, showing a group of riders in a brushy landscape; and *Tales of Counting Coup*, which features a circular composition that allows each figure prominence in the circle.

The show opens November 20 at Legacy's location in Scottsdale, Arizona. Liang will be in attendance for the opening. 🦋