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Censored Chinese artist's photos coming to NYC

ULA ILNYTZKY, Associated Press
Updated 11:22 a.m., Wednesday, February 8, 2012

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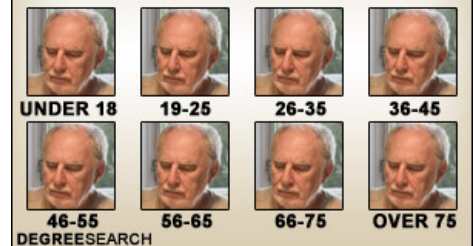
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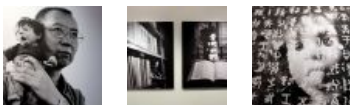
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This Tuesday, Feb. 7 2012 photo shows 2010 Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo holding a doll in a detail of a photograph by his wife, Chinese artist Liu Xia on display at during a preview of "The Silent Strength of Liu Xia" exhibit at The Italian Academy in New York. The photos were spirited out of China just before Liu was placed under house arrest after her husband, imprisoned in 2009 for urging democratic reform, won the Nobel. Her works are censored in her native country. The exhibition opens Thursday, Feb. 9, 2012. Photo: Mary Altaffer / AP



▶ On tape: Great white circles boat... CBSNEWS



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NEW YORK (AP) — Liu Xia is a forbidden artist whose work is censored in her native China. The photographer, who is under house arrest, uses life-like dolls as metaphors for the pain and suffering of the Chinese people.

Liu knows what it is to work in an oppressed society. Her husband is [Liu Xiaobo](#), the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize winner jailed in 2009 for 11 years for urging democratic



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reform in China.

But Liu's photographs are not about her husband, said [Guy Sorman](#), a friend of the couple and curator of an exhibition of her works opening at [Columbia University](#)

on Thursday evening.

"This is not about politics first. It's about art first. Her husband is his own story. She is a major Chinese artist who happens to be the wife of Liu Xiaobo," Sorman said in a telephone interview from Paris.

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The 25 photos were spirited out of China just before Liu was placed under house arrest at the end of 2010 after her husband was awarded the Nobel prize.

When Sorman last saw Liu in September 2010, she gave her consent to have the pictures shown in Europe and the United States. But to avoid suspicion, a network of her friends helped get them out of the country "one by one," he said. "It was a long process."

A museum in Boulogne outside of Paris exhibited them in the fall.

"The Silent Strength of Liu Xia" at Columbia runs through March 1 and is the only planned U.S. show. Afterward, it will travel to Madrid and Hong Kong.

Sorman discovered the photos by accident while visiting the couple's Beijing home. He immediately began convincing the "very, very shy" Liu, who is in her 50s, to let him exhibit them. She declined at first because she thought they were not important.

Because of her home confinement, she is unaware of the New York exhibition opening Thursday. "The only way to communicate with her is through her mother," who also lives in Beijing, said Sorman.

"In a way her condition is worse than her husband's. He's in jail, where strangely enough you have a telephone, you have a television. She has none of these rights," he said.

In her country, Liu is better known for her poetry, which was published in the 1980s.

"Then she disappeared. She decided to vanish behind her husband and started painting and photographing — but for herself," said Sorman.

The black and white photos — most measuring 3-feet by 3-feet — are taken with an old-fashion camera and printed with very limited technical resources.

The "ugly babies" pictures, as she calls them, represent the Chinese people and their facial "expressions reflect their pain," said Sorman, a columnist and author in economics and philosophy.

The dolls, which a visitor from Brazil gave Liu two decades ago, are arranged in a series of sets designed by Liu in her apartment.

Her husband holds up a doll with an anguished face in one image. A tied-up doll sits in front of an open book in another. Another doll, shown under a pile of books, "represents the weight of

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the old Chinese civilization" and the country's crackdown on artists and activists, said Sorman.

Among them is dissident writer [Yu Jie](#), who in January left for the United States. He said he intended to write books about Liu Xiaobo and Chinese President [Hu Jintao](#).

That same month, prominent Chinese human rights activist, [Hu Jia](#), said he was questioned by police at length for speaking out about a prominent rights lawyer who is jailed and also about a letter he wrote to the Nobel Peace Prize committee appealing for greater attention to the plight of the Lius.

"These are very simple photos ... but she gives you a measure of how difficult life is in China, especially for artists and intellectuals," said Sorman

Another interesting dimension of her photography is that she works in black and white.

"The way she uses black as a color is very much in the Chinese tradition of calligraphy," Sorman said. "Liu represents a new birth, a new generation of artists" in China.

"She exists in her own right, her own name and her own work," he added.

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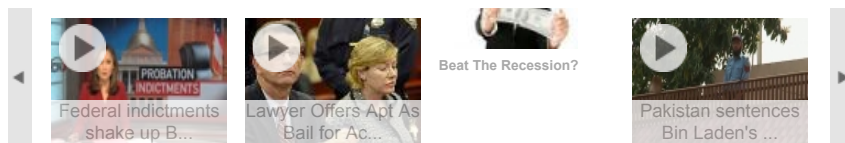
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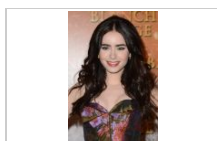
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