On September 29, 2016, the United States Embassy in Ottawa, Canada, honored the late Anne Chu through the State Department’s “Art in Embassies” program. It described her as a multidisciplinary artist whose art spans the realm between representation and abstraction, and pointed out that “her sculptures and drawings blend a variety of historical and cultural references, while focusing on the way materials can evolve and fuse into one another.”

No statement could come closer to describing A Chess Player, a large wooden sculpture depicting a figure which eludes identification or possibly contains multiple ones. It seems that diversity is built into not only Chu’s overall body of work, but often within the individual works themselves. Looking at The Chess Player from a distance, the viewer is certain it is George Washington playing chess; a little closer and we are possibly looking at a figure from the French Revolution, while an even closer look brings face to face with an angel.

Many of Chu’s sculptures suggest or contain multiple allusions, and her Chess Player is no exception. And while her allusions may be evident, they also go a long way into perplexing or intimidating viewers, who are left to doubt their own eyes or wonder whether they dare to assert an identification. Do I dare say it is George Washington playing chess? The chess board tends towards mother of pearl or ivory, much like George Washington’s real chess board at the Museum of American history.

A closer look at the sculpture which teeters between abstraction and reality reveals a mashing together of roughly seesawed pieces of wood, which from the front almost clearly portray an ivory powdered wig. Gazing at the wig and following it to the back, it evolves into the shape of a soldier’s helmet. Or is it not? Even the neutral yet multi-shaded ivory costume, which upon close view gives way to patches of gray, seen from the back, along with helmet-evolving wig looks much like a camouflage uniform reminiscent of anything but a leisurely chess game. Much like Anne Chu’s work, A Chess Player confounds and intimidates the viewer who sees hints of more than one historic figure, only to be negated by a
About the Artist

Born in New York City to Chinese immigrant parents, Anne Chu was an American artist whose work included sculpture and painting. She is especially known for her painted sculptures, which she created from a variety of materials. Chu graduated from the Philadelphia College of Art in 1982, and received a Masters of Fine Arts from Columbia University in 1985. She was also the recipient of many prestigious grants and awards, including the John and Simon Memorial Guggenheim Fellowship in 2010, a Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant in 1999, and the Alpert/Ucross Residency Prize in 2009. Her work has been widely exhibited both nationally and internationally, including at the Dallas Art Museum, the Berkeley Art Museum, and the Indianapolis Museum of Art. She had solo exhibitions at 303 Gallery (New York), Donald Young Gallery (Chicago), Victoria Miro Gallery (London), and Monica De Cardenas (Milan), as well as the Dallas Museum of Art, and the Neuberger Museum of Art in Purchase, New York, among other venues. Her work was written about in the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, Frieze, and Art in America, among other publications.