

“LOVE IS LIKE A ROSE; IT NEEDS TIME, PATIENCE AND CARE TO KEEP IT LIVELY AND LASTING.”

hairstyles created out of thin wire. Modern interpretations of the famous sculpted figures from the Qin and Han dynasties, the works can be seen as a protest against cultural erosion in the face of increasing globalisation.

The artist has been the lucky recipient of a host of prestigious awards. His signature *Ode to the Motherland No.4* graced the cover of French art magazine *Art Actuel* this February to illustrate his inclusion in a list of 100 famous international artists. As for non-artistic tributes, last year the dynamic sculptor was named one of China's top 10 fashionable men by *Esquire* magazine.

BACCARAT: What inspired you to become a sculptor?

CAI ZHISONG: I had an unhappy childhood, and as a teenager life was hard. I wanted to be an artist, so I studied extremely hard at school in order to achieve that goal. I believed all my efforts would pay off one day.

What has influenced your art?

Since I was a child I have enjoyed studying history and would examine sculptures from different regions and traditions. The Egyptian and Greek periods had a great influence on sculpture, while in Chinese history the years spanning the Han dynasty to the Northern dynasty were significant. The Mayan culture of Central America also had an impact on me.

I was greatly influenced by Buddhist philosophy and beliefs too. Buddhism helped me to become a calmer and happier person; I was finally able to achieve a sense of inner peace. As a Buddhist, I try to do good deeds, as I believe that what we do in life will eventually come round to us again with consequences.

How do you approach your work?

As a professional sculptor and ex-professor, I have a strong technical framework to my pieces, though I believe artists should express themselves freely and broadly instead of restricting their creativity to what they have been taught in class. There are infinite ways to approach a subject and create a particular work. Therefore, I brainstorm



Venice Cloud

vertically, beginning with technique and then considering form, composition, materials and spatial factors. I'm a perfectionist. My goal is to do the best in everything.

What was the turning point in your career?

After years of hardship and sorrow, I finally saw light at the end of the tunnel – and in my life – when I received international recognition. I was awarded the prestigious Taylor Prize for my Motherland sculpture at the Salon d'Automne in Paris [an annual art show]. I was 29 years old and the first Chinese artist in 103 years to get this honour. Domestically in 2004, I was awarded the Bronze Prize at the 10th National Art Exhibition and the President's Prize at the Central Academy of Fine Arts. In 2011, I was thrilled to represent China in the Venice Biennale with my massive *Cloud* series.

Tell us about your Motherland sculptures.

There are three series altogether. After graduation, I created *Ode to Motherland* from 1999-2006, a series of nine sculptures. All were male nudes in different poses; most were made of glass-fibre reinforced resin, copperplate and brass wire. Then from 2001-2008 I worked on *Custom to Motherland*, five pieces in total, comprising male and female figures. They were made of either glass-fibre reinforced resin, sheet lead and lead wire, or bronze. Refinement to *Motherland*, which I created in 2003, is a wall petition in five parts made of steel plates and two Chinese painting scrolls in sheet plate, lead plate and brass wire.

And your Rose series?

In 2008, I began to develop a new theme. I used to buy fresh roses from the market every day and made roses out of lead. I got white, pink and yellow ones and carefully observed their beautiful forms and gestures, usually picking the best of the bunch as the inspiration for my creations. Therefore, each work in my *Rose* series is one-of-a-kind as every rose is different.

I use the rose as a metaphor to signify love in life. People experience different paths and outcomes in their love life. Some people have happy and fulfilled marriages, other go through painful relationships. Just like love, a rose is a very soft and fragile flower which blossoms for only a short period of time. Hence I used soft lead as the material to express it.

Can you elaborate on your view of love and beauty?

Love is like a rose; it needs time, patience and care to keep it lively and lasting. A rose is also like our body; it is born, it blossoms and then it withers. Love is like a lead rose which eventually becomes ruined.

Maintaining a rose's beauty costs more than its initial value. Beauty is a decoration; it beautifies an empty happiness and the passage of life. Love does not last forever, so it is not worth paying a lifetime for it. It takes a few predestined relationships to proceed to moments of joy.

Without exception, love ends in pain. So to me, a rose and love are both beautiful violent disruptions.



Why did you create your latest series, Cloud?

In 2011, I was extremely honoured to be one of five artists asked to exhibit in China's pavilion at the Venice Biennale. I created *Cloud*, my newest and largest ever sculpture – ultimately the most innovative and exciting breakthrough in my career. If the rose represents love, then the cloud is life. They are both unpredictable and affect us in many ways.

At the biennale, different sized clouds were filled with helium, with the biggest measuring 700cm by 400cm by 300cm. The surface of the sculpture consisted of dried peonies with wire mesh, rubber, resin and plastic film underneath. The clouds rose and fell automatically according to the temperature each day. Visitors felt a sense of zen and calmness walking freely among the clouds. My gigantic cloud sculptures were well received, prompting positive and controversial discussions.

For more information and inquiries about Cai Zhong's work, see www.caizhong.cn or email caizhong@126.com