

The Li Chen
When Night Light Glimmers
Beacon



Title "The Beacon" Series: When Night Light Glimmers

Artist Li Chen

Publisher Asia Art Center Co., Ltd.

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Designer UNIQUE AD OFFICE
Printed by C.F. Design and Production

Publish Date July 2010

ISBN 978-986-86332-1-6

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書 名 夜光盈昃 -【天燧】系列

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出版者 亞洲藝術中心有限公司

董 事 長 李敦朗

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 設
 計
 博揚廣告企劃有限公司

 印
 刷
 百崴文化印刷股份有限公司

出版日 2010年7月

ISBN 978-986-86332-1-6

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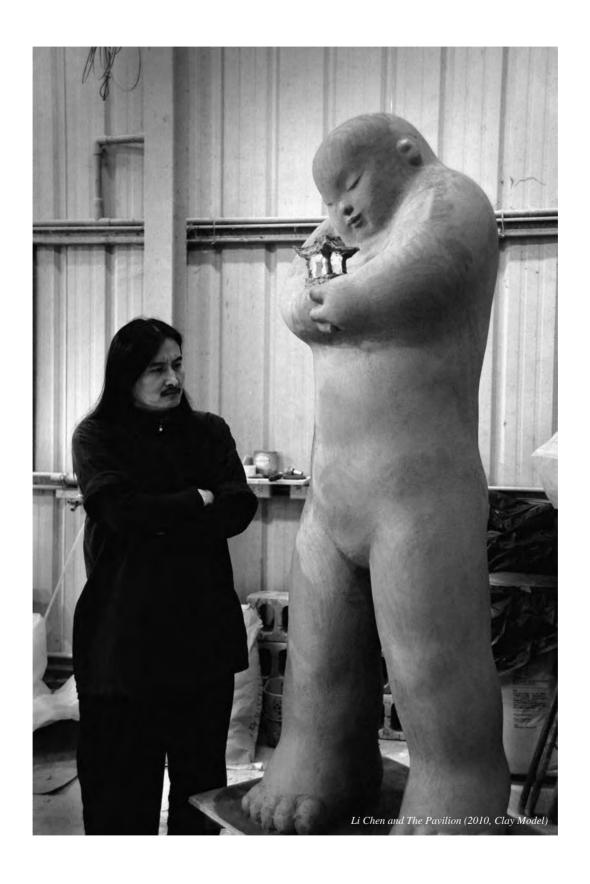
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天燧是一種儀式,「盈昃」才是它的生命。



Behind the Beacon series is a ceremonial process; its essence lies in Yinze

- the full or diminishing glory of the sun and the moon.





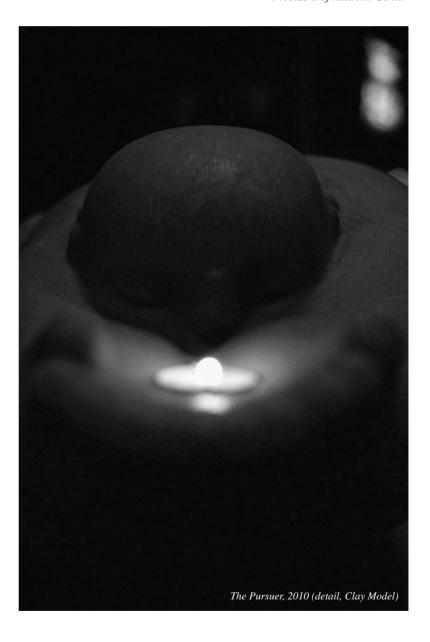


It's self-introspection.... a world without sound.

是一種內觀的....沒有聲音的世界。

Of Spiritual Light and Aesthetic Delight

Thomas Lee President of Asia Art Center



I have been an avid admirer of Li Chen's works for several years. and till today, I am still amazed by the new experiences and fresh insights his art often brings. Through his art, he enables others to discover the philosophy of life and uncover certain social phenomena that would otherwise be overlooked. He seeks to present modern man's impression of religion and his multiple perspectives on the subject, with the union of heaven and man, of closing the gap between heaven and earth as the common thread that runs through his artistic endeavors. We have also encountered his brand of "aesthetics of the void" in which the Taoist concepts of qi (force) and "energy" are paramount, and seen how he sought spiritual space in the series Spiritual Journey Through the Great Ether (2001-). Indeed, his pursuit of spiritual happiness in the universe as well as his focus on the interdependent relationship between spirit, body and soul are philosophical concerns that dominate many of this works.

Looking back, Li Chen has come a long way since his first solo exhibition in 1999, the *Venice Biennale* held in 2007 to the recent blockbuster at the Singapore Art Museum in 2009. His rotund figures in smooth, black lacquer that were imbued with spiritual verve and adorned with gold and silver were displayed in numerous exhibitions across Europe, America and Asia over the last decade, winning over audiences and garnering critical acclaim. Ultimately, it is the spirit each work exudes that makes it so enduring. In the *Beacon* series (2009-), a brand new series of eight sculptures, spiritual light in its most transcendent form literally illuminates a string of memories and cultural connotations. How would the audience interact with these new works? What would their reaction be? This is something I await with great anticipation.

Being the highly popular artist that he is, Li Chen has been kept busy staging various exhibitions both at home and abroad. While enjoying a rare moment of peace and quiet at home one day, he lit the candle that has been left idle on his Buddhist altar for a long time. Immediately his mood is transformed, as he felt a surge of subtle but real joy and an overwhelming sense of warmth and solitude. It led the artist into picking up the sketches he did for the series *Spiritual Journey Through the Great Ether*, which were left untouched for a long time. His efforts culminated in the work, *Illuminator* (2009), which marks the beginning of his *Beacon* series. In a sense, *Illuminator* brings *Spiritual Journey Through the Great Ether* to a close while serving as a preamble for the



Beacon series. Blessed with a constant stream of inspiration and a keen sense of observation, he is always able to provide modern man, who has become so busy with life that he often forgets the meaning of joy, the chance to experience art and be touched by it.

Legend has it that fire, the all-important element in the *Beacon* series, was first discovered by Suiren some 5000 years ago. Myths aside, it is a universal truth that the introduction of fire had greatly transformed the face of humanity and civilization. Today, the rapid advancement of science and technology has brought about profound changes to life, resulting at times in the disappearance or destruction of things of fundamental value. But the significance of fire remains unchanged throughout history; its importance as a source of heat and light transcends time and space, gender and race. The respect and affinity that humanity has for fire are manifested not only in daily life but also in various religious rituals. The use of the word "heavenly" in the Chinese naming of the series indicates the special place of fire to all mankind both past and present - a timeless gift bestowed from above.

Hot on the heels of *Illuminator* (2009) is *Soaring Dragon* (2010). A human figure riding on a pillow of cloud raises a golden dragon lamp in the air with one hand. The juxtaposition of various elements generates a lively, vibrant scene. The clever manner in which the artist crafted his composition is testimony to his unique style and exceptional skills. In *Fire Master* (2010), the Taoist sage traversing on a mountain cloud is an impressive sight to behold as he reins in a ball of fire that hovers before him. Amidst the fiery rapture a streak of light bolted forth, as if heralding an event as divine as the birth of Suiren. *Golden Palm* (2010) is the flamboyant deity with an illuminated palm who journeys freely

in the heavenly realm while caressing the moon in the waters. Spreading his arms like the wings of a jet plane, its horizontally positioned body conjures the illusion of speed, evoking a sense of movement in an otherwise inanimate piece of sculpture. There is a sense of liberation, as the will is freely unleashed to roam as it pleases. The glowing light from his golden palm further enhances the resplendent charm of the work.

Tribute is paid to a distinctly Chinese architectural element in Li Chen's next piece entitled Aerial Pagoda (2010). A human figure raises the seven-tiered structure, which commands respect and is a symbolic beacon of instruction, heavenward with his enormous arm. One cannot help but ask: is this a tower of light or a stairway for an immortal's ascent to heaven? Could it represent a Taoist mountain peak or some celestial wonder? The mythical element is featured yet again in The Pursuer (2010), in which the artist created an amazing human form that exudes grace and speed. Its powerful physique is reminiscent of Kua Fu, the giant famous for his relentless pursuit of the sun in an attempt to catch it according to Chinese mythology. But what is Li Chen's heroic figure chasing after? Could the answer possibly lie in the flame burning in his outstretched hands? Is he chasing after goals and dreams or undertaking a quest of faith? Ultimately its interpretation depends on how one defines his goals in life as well as his understanding and experiences of life. A white cloud twirling around the waist of the figure is evocative of a bubble foam bath, triggering the imagination and lending a surprising touch of humor to the otherwise thought-provoking theme. Such is the wondrous creativity of Li Chen.

Angelic Smile (2010) and The Pavilion (2010), also from the Beacon series, put the spotlight on the feminine form. Tapping on his deep knowledge of the oriental silhouette that he derived from studying both historical artifacts and the human figure in real life, the artist succeeds in creating figure whose country and race are instantly recognizable. When viewed from the back, both works offer a praiseworthy rendition of the Chinese figure executed in perfect proportion, with graceful posture and dramatic contours. To the bashful lass in Angelic Smile, the lotus flower is a source of comfort and joy for the mind and soul. Her well-rounded, full figure and elongated upper body are typical of both classical and modern Chinese female figures. The work may rouse a myriad of feelings in the viewer - one may feel a sense of blessing, longing, satisfaction and innocence, and even be inspired to make a wish. Here again, Li Chen shows his playful streak in his presentation of the cloud, which takes the shape of a shower cap or a pillow

resting on the head of the figure. When viewed from behind, the head is hidden by the cloud, which in turn resembles a rather abstract-looking face. We marvel yet again at how Li Chen stretches our imagination and piques our curiosity in his inimitable style.

On a visit to his alma mater, the artist found himself surrounded by changing architecture and an increasingly unfamiliar environment. As he gazed at the Chinese pavilion that was about to be torn down, he began to recall fond memories of his youthful days spent with his fellow classmates and even suggested keeping the structure for old times' sake. *The Pavilion* was created to cherish those memorable moments when friends in both ancient and present times would gather in similar shelters to engage in play or literary and cultural pursuits, to think and rest, or simply to admire the view come rain or shine. As in the *Aerial Pagoda*, the pavilion is also a unique oriental architectural feature. As his beloved pavilion awaits its fate, Li Chen seeks to celebrate the cultural life it embodies and capture the spirit it invokes through the creation of this masterpiece.

In the words of Li Chen, "Behind the purpose of the Beacon series is a ceremonial process; its essence lies in Yinze – When Night Light Glimmers."

Behind his highly representational works are abstract philosophical ideas, making his art a feast for the eyes and food for the soul. For an artist, the ideas and concepts behind an objet d'art are more important than its form, style and visual appeal. If a work of art lacks substance – a quality that can touch the heart deeply, it would not be able to withstand the test of time. We see this special spark in Li Chen's new works, which display his devotion to his craft from material to concept. His candid manner of interpretation, his ability to imbibe spiritual light or energy, and his keen observation of cultural life and the world at large and his natural portrayal of oriental humanistic elements capture the attention of many. At the core of his art making is relentless innovation and experimentation, and the key to his excellence lies in his unique talent. From changing times he derives inspiration, from history he extracts the truth, in order to create artworks that marry both tradition and modernity. The *Beacon* series is poised to ignite the international stage with its truthfulness, goodness and beauty and become a new oriental sensation that is full of charm and lyrical appeal.

(English translation by Goh Ngee Hui)





一點靈光與風采

亞洲藝術中心 董事長 李敦朗

幾年來觀賞著李真作品,總是有不同新體驗,他的藝術生命,不斷為人們挖掘出難以察覺的生活哲理與現象。從李真過去作品,我們曾經看到宗教在現代人眼中的形象及多角度領會,天人合一,拉近了天地之距離。我們也曾看過「氣」與「能量」的虛空美學,尋找精神空間的「大氣神遊」,存在宇宙中的心靈樂土,以及綜觀精神、身體、靈魂之互存與關係。

回顧起1999年首次個展到2007年威尼斯雙年展個展,2009年 新加坡國家美術館個展,經過十年橫跨歐美及亞洲無數大小 展覽,墨黑色霧亮漆表,渾圓敦厚之神韻與能量,金銀色彩 的神來之筆,李真開創作品特色和意境,廣為海內外辨識, 但李真每次新作所要傳達的精神,總是給人一次又一次驚喜 與滿足。夜光盈昃—【天燧】系列八件全新力作,充滿靈光 及視覺性,並引發出一連串記憶與文化思維,賦予雕塑品另 一種互動性價值,這次又將會帶來怎樣的感受,令人期待。

藝術家李真海內外炙手可熱,一連串展覽使生活更加忙碌。一日,有了一時的寧靜時刻,他發現家中佛堂蠟燭久未點燃,於是他點燃燭光。他感受到點燈為自己帶來心境上的變化,那種實在且微妙的樂趣,是享受温暖及孤獨,他決定拿起一件存放多時的【大氣神遊】系列手稿,將它化為今日雕塑作品一《燃燈》(2009)。這是李真【天燧】系列之源起,《燃燈》為【大氣神遊】系列畫下完美過程,卻又為【天燧】埋下伏筆,李真源源不絕的靈感及浪漫敏鋭的感知,對社會細膩觀察,每一次完成雕塑,總是給予忙碌而忘卻樂趣的人們,再次體驗藝術的感動。

【天燧】系列的重要元素,「火」,為距今約五千年前燧人 氏所發現,並靈活運用。因此,人類文明受到極大轉變。今 日科技因不斷推翻錯誤而發達,導致許多周遭生活事物都漸 漸變調,最純粹的意義都消逝變滅。火,對人類亙古不變, 無論古今中外、性別種族,火乃實用地為人類取暖、烹飪、 照明等,人類對火之敬重與情感,也可在各種生活現象與不 同宗教儀式裡發現蹤跡。【天燧】的「天」也就是這種劃破 時空,不分疆界之意。

繼2009年《燃燈》之後,《攀龍燭》(2010)那狂龍熾焰 人形幻化,攀騰躍舞,使整個空間燃起亢龍金火。山、雲、 人、金龍、火光相互轉化,交織出視覺層次,整體作品外觀 顯現活潑,李真雕塑作品在視覺鋪陳上,其獨特且深厚的功 力,展露熟練與巧妙運用。《天火》(2010)那位駕馭山雲 之道者,如唱名入世的氣勢,勒令雕塑物件之火焰,燃起光 的靈動,可謂為火中之火,猶如燧人氏降臨,有道換神通微 妙之境。《大羅金掌》(2010)是個無需視覺之神靈,祂 自由自在地遨遊天際,撫水中月,鼎金掌,放蕩不羈。猶如 噴射機的外型,呈現速度感,讓靜態雕塑,產生動態視覺效 果。這我行我素彷彿如意念行空,是解脱的智慧,其掌中藏 火,更顯雕塑品之神采。

《托塔》(2010),「塔」,中華建築特徵之一,在作品中被突顯出來,而七重寶塔的意義及樂趣,好似尊重,也彷彿是指示,然而底部的人物,其巨大神手延伸無窮天際,是光明燈?或登仙?是道峰?抑或天界之華…等。《追燭》(2010)那絕妙的人體姿態,不由得令人讚嘆,動態形體及速度感,彷彿夸父追日,但目標為何?我們看見追逐雕塑手中之燭光,而這燭火的意義,是一個目標?一個信仰?還是一個夢想?全都取決於每個人對生命追求的不同定義與體悟,而形似泡泡浴的雲朵縈紆腰間,卻又詼諧地引發不同聯想,其創意與奇特性讓人驚豔。

《捻花》(2010)和《蘭亭》(2010)是精神和人文思念, 對於人物著墨也有細膩描繪。李真以他對東方體態的觀察, 從歷史文物與週遭生活特徵,所作之人體肌理令人一眼辨出 作品的地域種族,為【天燧】系列延伸出篇外章。兩件作品 由背面觀賞,那東方人體比例和姿態與曲線,無不令人點頭稱善。《捻花》如是一位憨厚女子,靦腆仰望地享受著蓮花帶給她心靈愉悦,體象圓潤長腰低臀的比例,塑造出融合古典與當代華人女性普遍特質。另外,此作品也讓人有多種感受,如祝福、思念、滿足、單純、或者許願等。李真不改其創作中常有的幽默,女子後方雲彩,如浴帽或枕頭般處理,從背面觀賞,不見其頭,有如抽象臉孔,是李真作品中超乎外觀之想像和精采。

李真有次回母校,發現自己對新建築及環境早已不再熟悉,凝視即將計劃拆除的中式涼亭,喚起他許多年少時期與同學之間共同的記憶,他建議不應拆除,也藉由《蘭亭》緬懷古今達人於涼亭裡遊戲、論道、閱讀、養息、觀景、避雨、思考、入棋、品茗、操琴、對詩等人文生活,而此建築確實為東方特色與文化區域象徵,不由得反問自己人文建築的情感。這位腰長低臀特徵的華人男子,優雅玩味地沉醉著即將遺珠,此也正是李真對文化生活之衍生。發揮這股氣韻的「蘭亭之光」,堪為極至經典之作。

李真:「天燧系列是一種儀式,『盈昃』才是它真正的生命。」

雕塑如此具象的藝術品,帶給我們卻是抽象哲學義理,除了感官享受又觸動我們內心深處。藝術家除了作品形式風格與視覺張力,藝術品內涵更加重要,一件精品,缺乏了動人心弦的涵意,其價值性可能就難以經過時代考驗。李真新作品從材質到理念,千年暗,一燈明,真誠詮釋,而他對靈光、靈氣之吸收,對文化生活與世界觀察,自然地刻劃出最具東方人文性的印象與價值。不斷創新和演進,是藝術家信仰的真際,獨特天份則是李真作品卓越之關鍵。從時代變遷中得到啟發,由歷史經驗裡萃取真理,為現代人帶來傳統與當代價值。【天燧】系列中的「真」、「善」、「美」,即將感動國際,新東方巡禮,必將更加詩意與風采。

A State of Perfect Harmony – The Sculptural Art of Li Chen

Fan Di'an Director of the National Art Museum of China





We live in a highly visual world, one in which various plastic languages of the arts influence and interpenetrate each other, resulting in a barrage of forms that are vaguely familiar, yet easily forgettable. This is not the case in Li Chen's sculptural art, which never fail to leave a lasting impression on those who have seen his work. Highly individualistic and dynamic in style, his stunning sculptures invade our vision field like celestial creatures from afar, or grab our attention like unique treasures rich in historical and cultural connotations.

Over the years, I have had pockets of opportunities to see Li Chen's works. Rejoice as I would whenever I have the chance to catch a new launch of his sculptures, time has never permitted me the luxury of delving into the factors that go into the creation of his style, which seems to be as innate as it is natural and mature. Indeed his mature style belies the fact that he is only a middle-aged man - albeit a rather youthful looking one. I am not sure how other artists perceive Li Chen's works but to me, he is a gifted artist in pursuit of perfection in every sense of the word. His sculptures speak volumes for themselves - their robust forms, smoothly executed lines and brilliantly conceived imagery interweave to create a world of self-contentment.

For an artist to attain success he must find a means to resolve the various problems on hand revolving art making before he can begin to fulfill his dreams and goals. He must be able to integrate perceptual language and logical expression on a higher level so as to carve out his own creative vista. In my view Li Chen has managed to resolve at least three current issues in modern sculpture through his works. In other words, he has overcome the hurdles revolving the sticky issue of integration in sculptural art in three ways, culminating in an oeuvre with a distinctive style.

Firstly, although primarily concerned with the spiritual aspects of life, his sculptures do combine both secular and spiritual elements. Indeed Buddhist themes and philosophical ideas are sources of inspiration behind many of his works, indicating his preoccupation with the spiritual from an otherworldly realm, notwithstanding his life in the secular world. He transformed the myriad images of Buddha, Bodhisattvas and Buddhist disciples into monumental



sculptures that exude an ethereal, carefree spirit. We could even use the title of "Sakyamuni" to describe all his Buddhist-themed sculptures. Nevertheless, he is not a Buddhist artist by definition but an artist who has a deep understanding of Buddhist philosophy and one who immerses himself in the world of Buddhism. It is no wonder that the works he produces are distinctive in style and extraordinary in vision, often marrying Buddhist themes with subjects on nature and the universe to create forms and shapes of "Sakyamuni," whose presence charge the earth with their Taoist vigor. By combining both the spiritual and the secular, and coloring his Buddhist figures with elements and details from secular life, viewers can identify easily with his sculptural works. Indeed he has imbued his figures with this dichotomous character in a most natural fashion.

Secondly, his sculptures may be fundamentally oriental in terms of aesthetics, but they do combine elements from both the East and the West. A work of sculpture is about fashioning an image in three-dimensional form, and to that end the history of western sculpture provides a rich source of reference. The manner in which Li Chen creates volume and form in his works reflects his ability in grasping the sculptural language of the west. More importantly, his works show his keen interest and profound knowledge of oriental philosophy. Underlying the integration of Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist ideas and concepts is the pursuit of the union of man and heaven, which is as much a recurring theme in his art that resonates among many as it is a highly treasured aspect of his

work. Through self-cultivation and learning, he honed his craft and became an artist with a very clear vision in mind, drawing upon the essence of Chinese culture and civilization for creative inspiration. As he seeks to bring out the inner substance of each work, he does not compromise on the aesthetics of its form. He searches for that inner logic that exists between the East and the West in a rational manner, letting the spiritual essence manifest from the inside out as integration between the East and the West gather momentum. His art, in all its lyrical charm and magnificent quietude, is a harmonious blend of these two traditions.

Thirdly, in terms of sculptural language Li Chen is able to align the material he uses with the spirit behind his works, so that there is perfect union between the material and the spiritual. Highly perceptive to the types of sculptural material, the artist is adept at employing the appropriate material for his purposes. With great expertise his transforms simple materials with uniform colors into objects of beauty. For instance, he is able to augment his artistic theme by using the color scheme comprising black, white and gray found in oriental aesthetics. In his hands, sculptures made of bronze, stone and other heavy materials take on a light, fluid character that enabled them to "float" effortlessly in the atmosphere. His works are infused with an indescribable charm that transcends the physical. Through the choice and treatment of material, he has transformed sculptural material into a spiritual language.

Li Chen's works have traveled far and wide, both at home and abroad. On behalf of the National Art Museum of China, I welcome the opportunity to showcase his works here in Beijing, which would allow more members of the public to admire his art. May the exhibition enjoy resounding success!

(English translation by Goh Ngee Hui)

Originally published in "In Search of Spiritual Space - Li Chen Solo Exhibition at the National Art Museum of China," Asia Art Center, 2008, pp.4-5.





圓融之境一李真的雕塑世界

中國美術館館長 范迪安

我們正處在一個圖像世界高度發達的時代,許多藝術的造型語言相互影響滲透,形式似曾相識,過目之後往往不能留下深刻的印象。但李真先生的雕塑是那種看過一眼便會令人不能忘記的藝術,它們以極為個性的面貌和極為強烈的風格讓人歎為觀止,猶如天外來客驚擾視線,也如遠古經典遺世獨立。

許多年來陸續有機會得以觀賞李真先生的作品,每次看到, 往往來不及細究他風格的形成之因,只顧欣喜他作品又一次 新的問世。似乎他的風格是與生俱來的,也是天然成熟的, 儘管他只人到中年,甚至模樣還顯得年輕。我不知道別的藝 術同仁在在他的作品面前是何種感受,但是我相信他是一位 有著天賦才情的藝術家,也是一位追求完美境界的藝術家。 他的雕塑擁有自足的世界,那是由他作品飽滿的形體、圓潤 的線條和通體渾然的意象交織而成的。

倘若仔細思量,一個藝術家的成功,必然是在存高遠之志的 基礎上找到了解決問題的方法論,使感性的語言和理性的方 式達到高層次的統一,方能成就一番具有創造性的景象。依 我淺識,李真先生的雕塑至少在三個方面解決了當代雕塑創 造面臨的課題,或者說,他的雕塑在三個方面解決了諸多矛 盾統一的因素,從而孕化和催生出了別樣的成果。

其一,他的雕塑在品格上是以超俗為根本、凡俗與超俗的統一。李真先生的藝術大多取材於佛教主題或佛家思想,這表明了他身在世俗生活空間而懷想塵外世界的精神訴求。的確,他所做的大量佛祖、菩薩以及弟子的形象,是一尊尊超越塵世、自在自為的大像,甚至可以用「世尊」來概括他做



的全部佛教主題雕塑。但是,他不是一個佛教藝術家,而是 一個深刻領悟了佛家思想並沉浸於佛學境界中的藝術家,因 此他的創造是獨特的,視野是超越性的,總是把佛教主題與 自然主題、宇宙主題聯繫起來,使作品的造型如是一種吐納 太極、充盈天地的「世尊」。有意味的是,他在造型上還表 現出一種將凡俗與超俗結合在一起的樣式,佛教人物也擁有 世俗生活的形態、神情與細節,由此讓人們感覺到它們與人 世間情感的接近,形象自然而然具有雙重的內涵。

其二,他的雕塑在美學上是以東方為主導、西方與東方的統一。雕塑著重要解決的是三維形體的塑造,西方雕塑史提供了雄厚的經驗。李真先生的作品在雕塑的體量塑造等方面反映出他掌握西方雕塑語言的能力。但是,更多地折射出他對東方哲學的濃烈興趣和深厚底蘊,看他的作品,儒、道、佛多家思想融會而成的天人合一讓人感同身受。這正是他創作的可貴之處。他通過內在的修煉而成為一位主體意識十分鮮明的藝術家,著重從華夏文明與文化的遺產中吸取精華,他在追求作品內在品質的同時,並沒有犧牲其本身的形式美感,而是理性地尋找東方與西方之間的內在邏輯,在東與西的統一融合中實現由內而外的精神再現。他的藝術在生動的氣韻和偉大的靜穆之間形成了通融的二元組合。

其三,他的雕塑在語言上是從材料導向精神、材料與精神的統一。李真先生是一位對雕塑材料有高度敏感並且特別善於運用材料語言的藝術家,他所選用的材料都十分單純,色澤也特別統一,並且通過高超的打造技巧賦予材料以美感。例如,他使用東方美學中的黑白灰色彩體系就極大地強化了他的藝術主題,本是厚重的青銅、石子等材料經過他的處理變得輕巧靈動,猶如大氣漂浮,而且充滿著藝術家創作的「物外之趣」。通過對材料的選擇與處理,他使雕塑的材料變成了精神的語言。

李真先生的作品在海內外已有廣泛的傳播,這次他的作品在 北京中國美術館展出,將讓更多的公眾獲得觀賞他的藝術的 機會。我謹代表中國美術館對他的展覽表示歡迎,並祝展覽 圓滿成功!

原文載於《尋找精神的空間一李真中國美術館個展畫冊》,亞洲藝術 中心,2008,頁4-5。





More than 10 thousand years ago, primitive man had already learnt how to make a fire. A concrete example relating to the origin of fire is the story of Suiren, who was the first to discover fire from drilling wood according to ancient Chinese texts. In Greek mythology, the Titan Prometheus, who could not bear to see humans living in pain and suffering, stole fire from Mount Olympics, the residence of the gods. As a result he incurred the wrath of Zeus, who chained him to the cliff at Mount Caucasus where he was left to suffer the immense pain of having an eagle eat his liver every day. Be it a myth or legend, the discovery of fire has indeed a profound impact on human civilization, bringing both progress and change to humanity.

As the history of fire takes its course, man eventually discovered how to light a lamp with fire. And even though the electric lamp was invented more than a century ago, the act of lighting a lamp is still practiced today. Its religious significance cannot be understated. For instance, devout worshippers would light candles during Catholic masses. Apart from imparting brightness and an aura of holiness, the candlelight here symbolizes the light that is the Savior Jesus Christ, who shines upon humanity to save them from eternal darkness. In Buddhism, light is used to worship the Buddha. However, as Buddha has already attained nirvana, he transcends all notions of relativity. Therefore there is no distinction between light and dark, day and night. Lighting a lamp thus becomes an opportunity for devotees to worship and meditate. As such it is appropriate that the lamp be lit both day and night. According to the Avatamsaka Sutra, "placing a lamp in a dark room dispels its darkness even if it has been there for tens and thousands of years. The same applies to the lamp shining in the Buddha's heart. When its light enters the hearts of the masses, it can eliminate all unspeakable ill fortunes, pains and troubles." In another Buddhist passage from the Sutra of the Buddha's Teachings on the Merit of Lighting the Lamp, it is written that "those who bring light offerings to the Buddhist pagodas and

Welcoming the Beacon – A Perfect Physical and Spiritual State

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temples will gain four types of joys. First, it benefits the body; second, it boosts your wealth and assets; third it is an act of goodness and virtue; and fourth it bestows wisdom." This explains the reason why the dignified image of the Buddha Dipamkara has become an indispensable source of spiritual comfort in the lives of many devotees.

Lighting the lamp – the inspiration behind the Beacon Series

To Li Chen the artist, lighting the lamp is more of a form of rest and rejuvenation than a religious ritual. In contrast with light from an electric lamp, the flickering flame from a burning candle suggests a sense of verve and life, triggering a kind of chemical reaction that invigorates the surrounding with the pulsating breath of life. In recent years the artist has been busy shuttling between the mainland and Taiwan due to various work commitments. Returning often to an empty house, he would light a lamp and enjoy a moment of tranquility, solitude and warmth. He explained, "In the high-tech world we live in, everything is done at breakneck speed. People's minds and hearts are often troubled and worried. But through kindling a lamp and watching its glow, people can

learn to slow down their pace and relax their minds." It is through such a simple act, almost evocative of a holy ritual, that Li Chen found the inspiration for his latest series of works entitled the *Beacon*.

Comprising only eight sculptures, the *Beacon* series is more diverse in terms of shapes and forms and does not entail ideas from only a singular religion as compared to previous series of works. At the same time, Li Chen does not stop at merely imbuing his works with aesthetic appeal; he also tries to encourage communication of the mind and spirit between artist and viewer. In the context of contemporary art, both Chinese and foreign audiences would be touched by a calling to delve deeply into the inner self through direct interaction with the sculptural works. From there they would be enlightened as to how closely linked they are to their own cultures. The ideal state where art does not differentiate between races, language or culture could also be realized.

Completed in 2009, *Illuminator* is the earliest piece from the series. Its shape originated from a sketch done for the *Spiritual Journey Through the Great Ether*, a series of works that took several years to complete. In *Illuminator*, a figure with a childlike countenance stands on top of a celestial pinnacle. Resting against his chest is his cupped right palm, which acts as a candleholder. His left hand is erect, as if to prevent the flame from being snuffed out by the wind. This is also similar to one of the mudras or hand gestures found in Buddhist iconography. With eyes downcast, the child figure focuses on the miniature light, watching over this symbol of goodness and wisdom vigilantly. In all stillness and tranquility, the zest of its aesthetic flavor is easily palpable.

The first thing that the audience would notice in *Aerial Pagoda* (2010) is the seven-tiered Buddhist structure lacquered in gold. In Buddhism, the seven-tiered pagoda represents the need to advance in the learning and practice of Buddhist laws and teachings one level at a time until one eventually arrives at the Faramita

realm of wisdom. In Chinese iconography, Vaisramana, one of the Four Guardian Kings in Buddhism and Li Jing the pagodabearing Heavenly King in the classical novel *Investiture of the Gods* hold their pagodas in their left hands. Interestingly, in Li Chen's example, the pagoda is found in the figure's right hand, an intentional gesture on the artist's part. He may have cleverly infused his work with the symbolic meaning behind the pagoda but chose not to indicate any of the two deities above as the image upon which his figure is based. Taking things a step further, he elongated the arm that raised the pagoda to create a highly dramatic visual effect.

Golden Deity Daluo, the inspiration behind another work, Golden Palm (2010), is known as the Taoist deity of the highest order. If a devotee can attain his level of sage hood through cultivation of the Way, then his physical body and spirit will undergo a divine transformation that will help release him from the eternal cycle of birth and death. While we know for sure the origin of the Chinese title for Golden Palm, the portrayal of a figure in a horizontal position with one hand in the waters touching the moon and the other holding a flame heavenward conveys the movement and speed of a modern jet plane. The imageries of "touching the moon" and "fire in palm" are not at odds with each other and in fact its harmonious synthesis seems to conjecture the roaming of the free will.





In *Fire Master* (2010) the sage riding on a cloud harnesses a ball of golden fire suspended midair between his palms. The flickering flame is symbolic of a living object imbued with a spirit's breath. It will not be far-fetched to assume that Li Chen's figure is in fact Prometheus, who helped mankind by stealing fire from the gods - only thing is, the artist has adopted the physical features typical of an oriental figure in the articulation of his sculptural form. The three works above can be regarded as examples that borrow from different religious elements and combine them with a fresh sense of modernity.

A solemn theme laced with a touch of humor

To highlight the figural proportions and reflect the inner mind and spirit of the oriental person, Li Chen studied the plastic characteristics of Han terracotta figures, which are characteristically rustic and boundless in expression. Completely abandoning his past academic training that emphasized mimetic accuracy, he embraced purely aesthetical standards. Differences in figural proportions are suitably augmented, in order to express the inner spirit and develop a closer link with one's own culture through the creation of simplistic forms with heroic vigor. For example, in The Pavilion (2010) a rotund figure with a long body holds a small pavilion lacquered in gold. There is no direct reference to the narrative behind the Orchid Pavilion Gathering; rather it is an offshoot of the essence of tradition and culture. From another perspective, it may also represent Li Chen's nostalgic longing for the carefree interaction between scholars and artists of old. Soaring Dragon (2010) captures a series of rapid changes - of mountain and cloud, of man and dragon. The material design and visual variation appear rich, dazzling and diverse.

By his own admission Li Chen has a playful streak that is often revealed unintentionally or on purpose in his works. His sense of humor is highly evident in the *Beacon* series. *Angelic Smile* (2010) is a case in point. Its inspiration may have come from the famous account of Buddha silently holding a flower to signify his Buddhist heart while his disciple Kassapa Thera smiled in response and received instant enlightenment without any explanation in words. In contrast Li Chen's figure is a well-endowed lady with a long body and low waist, clutching a golden lotus with both hands. She wears a smile on her face, and looks as if she is about to speak – or is she not? Worthy of note is a cloudlike mass resting on the head of the figure, which looks more like a shower cap if viewed from the back. The effect is dignified and playful at the same time.

In Chinese, *The Pursuer* (2010) sounds like the word for "chasing after", which clearly expresses the meaning behind the work. Taking a huge stride forward with only one foot on the ground and arms extended forward, the figure holds a candle flame in both hands as he dashes through the clouds. Here, the candle flame seems to signify the light that will direct one's path. Interestingly, the white cloud wrapped around the figure's waist reminds one of a dance costume, which gives the entire work a feeling of lightness inherent in the graceful steps of a dancer. One cannot help but find the artist's humorous streak simply amusing.

Through these eight works in the *Beacon* series, Li Chen takes the visual effect of "heavy yet light", something which he has continually pursued in his creative efforts, and seeks to develop it even further. More importantly, he successfully added a touch of humor to his otherwise solemn body of sculptures, and spurred the broadening of mindsets and visions in today's fast changing world. Through his art he shares his inner spiritual world with the audience, so that they may also explore the mysteries and wonders of the spirit and soul and attain the realm of physical and the spiritual perfection.

(English translation by Goh Ngee Hui)

天燧迎火來·形神俱完足

藝外雜誌 副總編輯 張禮豪





在距今一萬多年前的原始人,就已經學會了人工取火,古籍 所載的燧人氏「鑽木取火」即為具體的事例反映。而在西方 的希臘神話裡頭,則是普羅米修斯不忍看見人類困苦的生 活,於是從眾神所居住的地方—奧林匹克山偷出火種,因此觸 怒宙斯。宙斯將他鎖在高加索山的懸崖上,並使他日日承受 被惡鷹啄食的痛苦。不管是神話或傳說,火的發現,對於人 類文明的改變與進步有著不可磨滅的重要地位。

點燈,便是在不斷演變的用火歷史中應運而生,即使距今電 燈已經發明了超過一世紀,依然無法被取代,甚至更藴藏了 莊嚴神聖的宗教意涵而歷久彌新。像是天主教作彌撒時,虔 誠信徒都會點上一根蠟燭,因為燭火除了帶有光明、神聖,同時也象徵了所有在黑暗中的人類被耶穌的光所照耀救贖的意味。佛教則用來供佛。然而,佛已經證得涅槃,超越一切相對法則,沒有所謂的晝夜明闇之別,因而燃燈實為令眾生有廣修供養的機會,故而宜應晝夜相繼長燃不熄。像是《華嚴經》云,「譬如一燈入於暗室,百千年暗,悉能破盡。菩提心燈亦復如此,一入眾生心室之內,百千萬億不可説劫,諸業煩惱種種暗障,悉能除盡。」另在《佛説施燈功德經》中則提到:「若有眾生於佛塔廟施燈明者,得於四種可樂之法。何等為四?一者色身;二者資財;三者大善;四者智慧。」也就是點燈供佛的人,可以獲到相貌莊嚴、資材充足、具備善根與大智慧。故而自唐代以降,法相莊嚴的行燈佛造像便成了庶民生活中不可或缺的精神支柱。

點燈,孕育【天燧】靈感

然而,對李真而言,點燈與其說是宗教儀式,還更像一種跨越信仰的「養息」動作。火焰飄搖躍動之際,不但比電燈顯得更加靈動而具生命力,更會如同化學作用,讓現場的氣氛充滿循環不息的呼吸。尤其近年來,因工作而在大陸、台灣兩地奔波的李真,經常一個人回到空蕩蕩的家中時,燃起燈來,享受那份寧靜、孤獨與温暖。李真説:「我們所處的這個時代是一個機械時代,凡事都太過於迅速,讓人的心靈增添不少煩憂。相反地,透過點燈的儀式,看著燭火,人的步調也會隨之放慢,達到緩和的效果。」從這具有神聖儀式般的切入,也誘發出李真最新【天燧】系列創作的靈感來。

【天燧】系列雖然只發展出八件作品,造型所涵蓋卻遠比此 前豐富多元,也不再僅僅關乎單一宗教的思想內容;同時, 李真更跳脱過往創作僅止於停留在視覺欣賞的層次,試圖將 創作者與觀者之間心靈精神的互動價值注入到作品之中。事 實上,如果將之放回當代藝術語境之中來討論,透過與作品 之間的直接互動,無論中西,觀者均得以催化深層自我的召 喚,進而體悟到各自與母體文化的緊密連結,不啻具現了藝 術不分人種、語言、文化的理想境地。

其中,最早於2009年完成的 《燃燈》一作,造型源自延續 多年的【大氣神遊】系列中的 一紙手稿,宛如孩童般的人物 造型直立在仙峰之上,右掌 放懷中,掌中內凹,以作為燭 台之用;左手豎起,像是為了 讓火焰免於為風所吹滅,也與 佛教造像所施手印相仿。童 雙眼下斂,正細心地看顧這擁



有光明、智慧等多重寓意的微光,令人輕易感受到無聲之中 所流露的悠然氣韻。

《托塔》一作中,觀者一望即見的無疑是髹上金漆的七重寶塔。七重寶塔在佛教之中,意味著佛法的修行必須層層提昇,逐步昇華,才能達到智慧的彼岸。然而,無論是佛教四大護法中的多聞天王,抑或是封神榜裡的托塔天王李靖,都是左手托塔。李真在此作中則一方面巧妙的援用七重寶塔的寓意,另一方面卻不欲作品形象輕易指涉上述二者的任何一位,因而刻意將七重寶塔移位至人物的右手上。尤有甚之,更誇張化地將此一托塔之手拉長,進一步製造出強烈的視覺

效果。在道教思想中,大羅金仙乃是等級最高的神仙,據説修道之人若能臻達此境,便可形神俱妙、不落輪迴。《大羅金掌》一作取題無疑出自此處,但是單手撫水中月,金掌上舉的側身人物形象,則營造出現代之噴射機疾速而過的動態與速度感。撫水中月與握掌中火兩種意象的並列,非但未見彼此抵觸,反而出現極為和諧的相容,就像是不受拘束的意念行空。《天火》那名騰雲駕霧的尊者,雙掌間一團金火懸空飄動,像是具有神靈氣息的活物,若要勉強與偷出火種幫助人類的普羅米修斯劃上等號,似乎也並不為過,所差者只在李真所採用的是全然東方人種身材特徵的造型罷。如此看來,前述三例,可說是借鑿不同宗教內涵卻又賦予時代新意的代表。

寓幽默於莊嚴的精神分享

為了凸顯東方人種的體態比例與內在生命情調,李真參考了漢俑稚拙卻自由的造型特色,全然地拋棄昔日務求刻畫精準的學院訓練,回歸到從純粹的美感要求,並且適時的強化肢體的比例差異,以求在簡約雄渾的造型中,尋求內斂的精神傳達,並與母體文化展生更為密切的連結。例如《蘭亭》一作中,所刻畫者乃是一名體軀渾圓而修長的人物雙手環抱一座髹上金漆的小亭,與眾人所熟知的「蘭亭雅集」之韻事並無直接的對應關係,更多是傳統文化內涵的延伸。同時,就另一個層面來看,或也代表了李真對於舊時文人墨客之間隨性交遊的感懷與嚮往。《攀龍燭》自山至雲,從人化龍,連串的飛騰變化,在材質設計或者視覺轉換上都更顯得層次豐富、風華自生。

自承本性帶著一絲調皮的李真,總是在有意無意之間將幽 默感滲透到作品裡頭,在【天燧】系列當中表現的尤其明 顯。像是《捻花》一作固然引用佛陀捻花,示現佛心,迦葉尊者,見性微笑,妙在不可言傳之典故,然而此作中體態圓潤、長腰低臀,雙手持拿金色蓮花的女子,表情正在説與不說之間的淺笑。值得注意的是,若果觀者從背後看去,當會發現人像頭上的雲朵造型似乎與浴帽更相似些,呈現亦莊亦諧的效果。《追燭》與「追逐」諧音,清楚表達此作意涵。李真形塑一尊大步邁開,單腳站立的人物正穿雲而過的模樣,向前平伸的雙手則捧著燭火,彷彿指引去路的光明所在。有趣的是,圍繞形象腰間的白雲猶如舞衣,使整件作品展現出一名舞者躍動的輕盈感,讓人忍俊不住,也反映出創作者趣味性格的一面。

透過【天燧】系列的八件作品,我們不但可以看到李真在創作上所持續追求的「既厚重又輕盈」的視覺觀感獲得了進一步的發揮;更可貴的是,他那萬幽默於莊嚴之中的內在精神分享,無疑在快速運轉的當下生活,開展了更加恢弘的視野,使觀者得以更輕易地探索心靈的玄奧與神妙,成就形神俱臻完足的境界。





I am not just making sculptures.
I am creating a sense of happiness,
a creation that people can enjoy.

我不只在做雕塑,我在創造幸福, 創造一種讓人享受的東西。







Illuminator 41x40.5x165cm Bronze 2009

燃燈



Illuminator (detail) 41x40.5x165cm Bronze 2009 燃燈(局部)

Illuminator (detail) 41x40.5x165cm Bronze 2009 燃燈(局部)





Soaring Dragon (detail) 48x33.5x139cm Bronze 2010 攀龍燭(局部)

Soaring Dragon (detail) 48x33.5x139cm Bronze 2010 攀龍燭(局部)





Soaring Dragon 48x33.5x139cm Bronze 2010 攀龍燭



Fire Master (detail) 54x41x124cm Bronze 2010 天火(局部) Fire Master (detail) 54x41x124cm Bronze 2010 天火(局部)





Fire Master 54x41x124cm Bronze 2010

天火



Golden Palm (detail) 77x39x95cm Bronze 2010 大羅金掌(局部) Golden Palm 77x39x95cm Bronze 2010 大羅金掌





Golden Palm (back) 77x39x95cm Bronze 2010 大羅金掌(背部)

Aerial Pagoda 47.5x30x168cm Bronze 2010 托塔



Aerial Pagoda (detail) 47.5x30x168cm Bronze 2010 托塔(局部)



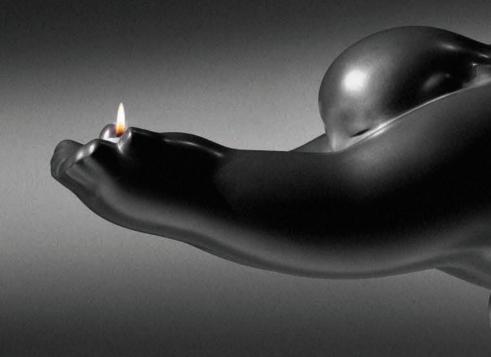




Aerial Pagoda (detail) 47.5x30x168cm Bronze 2010 托塔(局部)

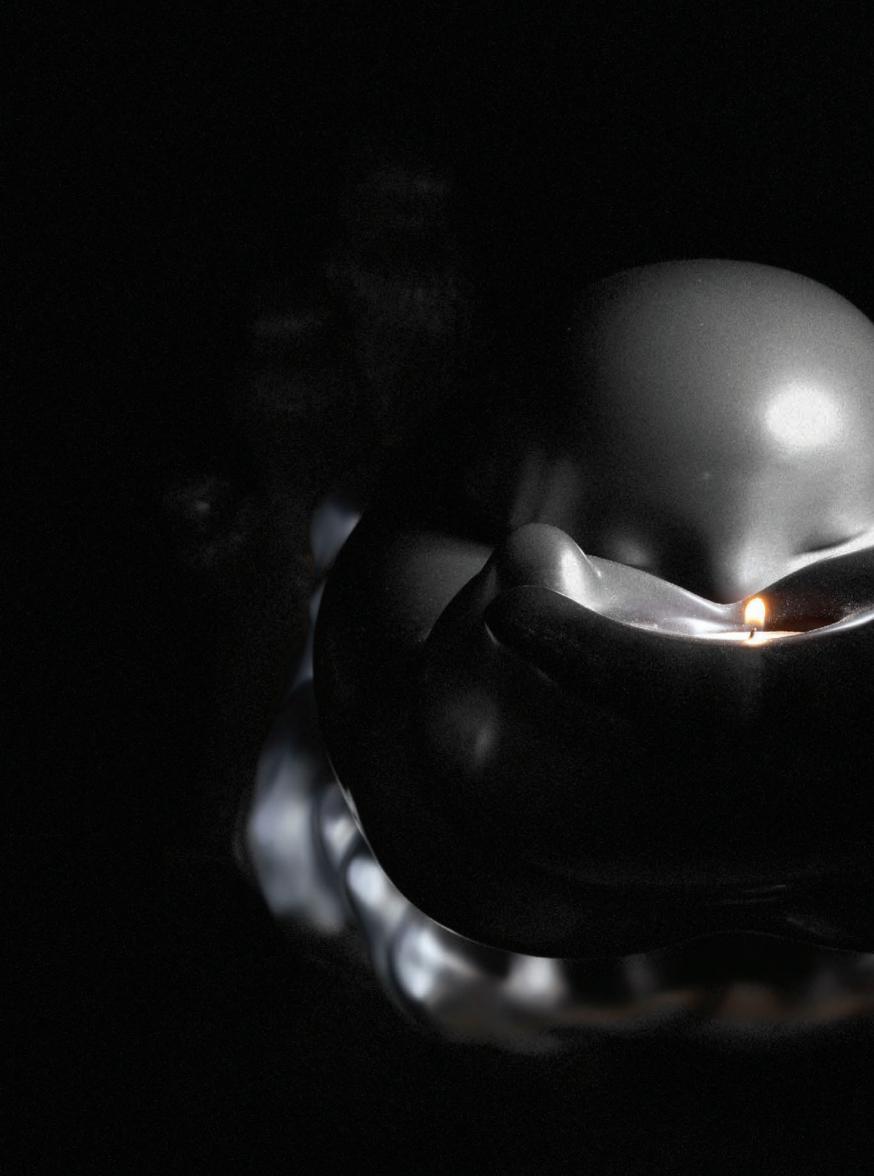






The Pursuer 113x48x53cm Bronze 2010 追燭



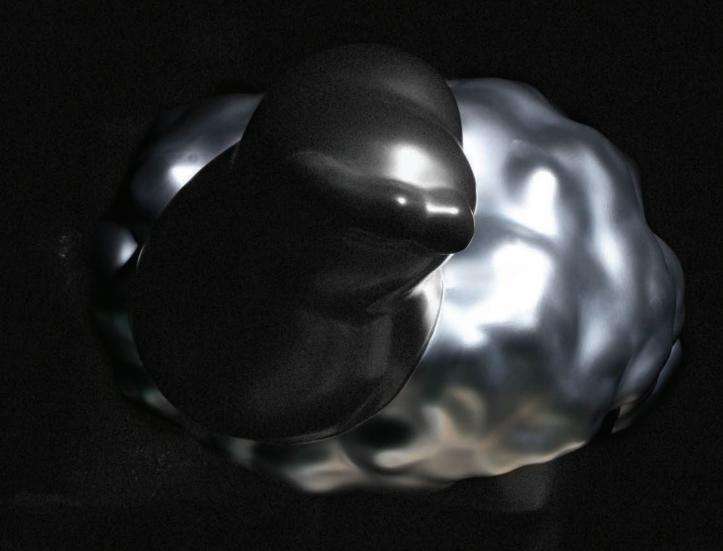








The Pursuer (detail) 113x48x53cm Bronze 2010 追燭(局部)





The Pursuer (detail) 113x48x53cm Bronze 2010 追燭(局部)



Angelic Smile (detail) 46x55.5x125.5cm Bronze 2010

捻花(局部)



Angelic Smile 46x55.5x125.5cm Bronze 2010 捻花





Angelic Smile (detail) 46x55.5x125.5cm Bronze 2010 捻花(局部)



 The Pavilion (detail) 62x44.5x168cm Bronze 2010 蘭亭(局部)







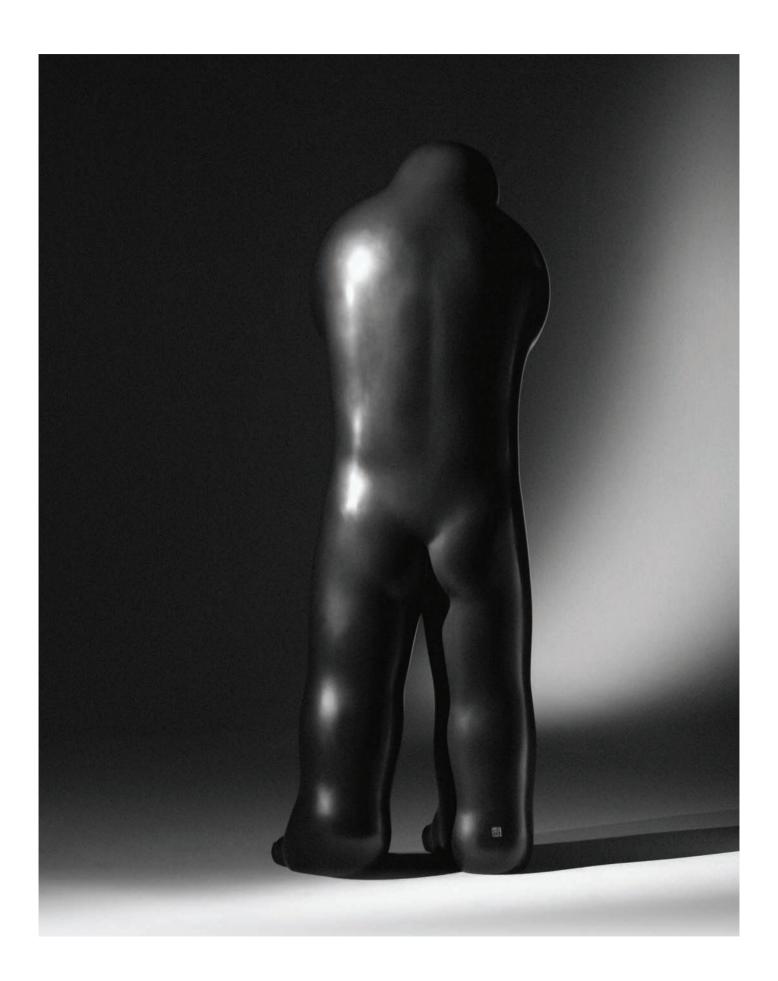
The Pavilion (detail) 62x44.5x168cm Bronze 2010 蘭亭(局部)



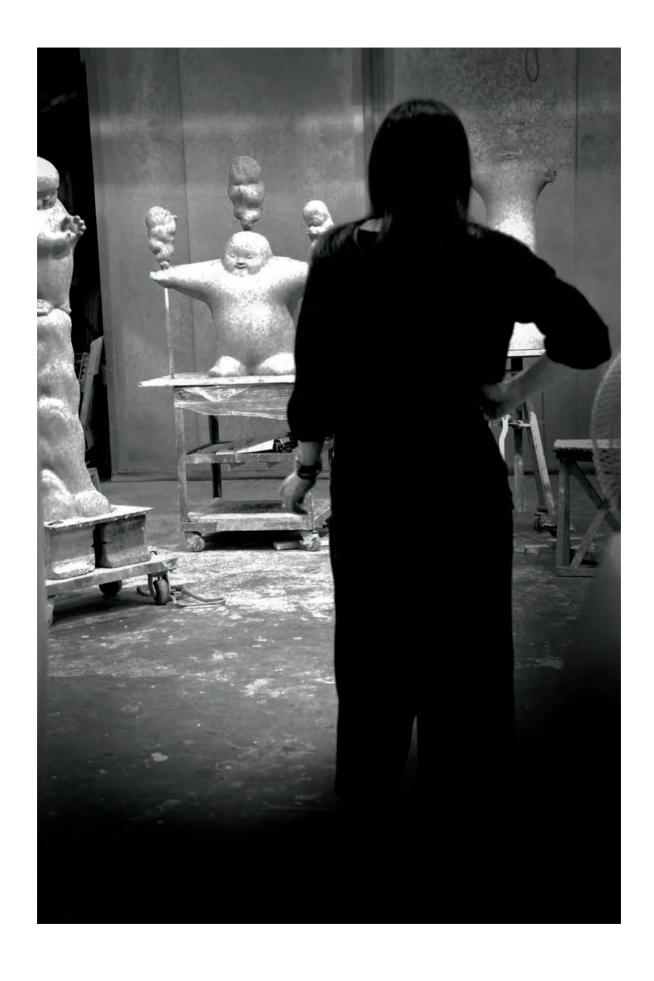
The Pavilion (detail) 62x44.5x168cm Bronze 2010 蘭亭(局部) The Pavilion 62x44.5x168cm Bronze 2010

蘭亭

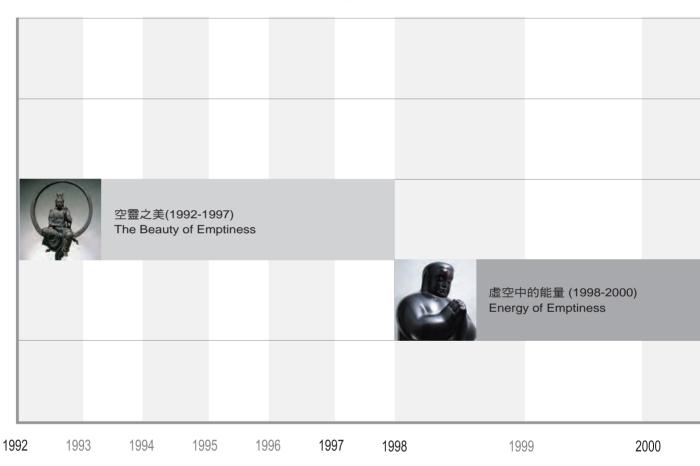


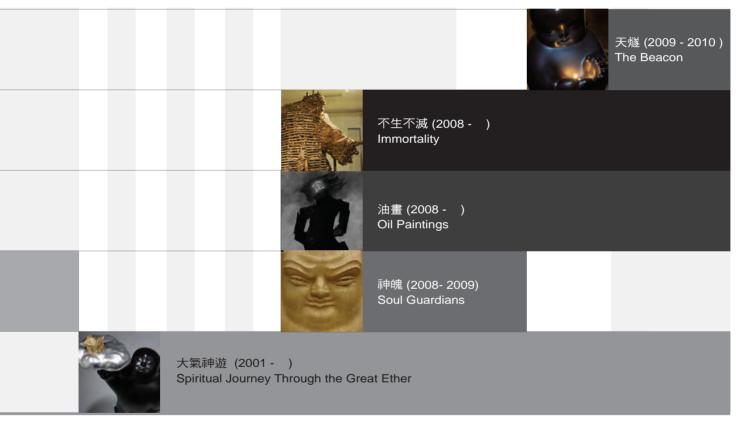


The Pavilion (back) 62x44.5x168cm Bronze 2010 蘭亭(背部)



李真創作系列一覽表 Li Chen Chronology





2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008

www.lichensculpture.org

Li Chen Biography

Solo Exhibitions			Chinese Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition", Asia Art
			Center, Beijing, China
2009	"Li Chen: Mind • Body • Spirit", Singapore Art Museum,		"China Onward: Chinese Contemporary Art, 1966-2006",
	Singapore		The Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen,
2008	"Soul Guardians" - Li Chen 2008 Solo Show, Asia Art Center,		Denmark
	Beijing, China		"China Onward: Chinese Contemporary Art, 1966-2006",
	"In Search of Spiritual Space", National Museum of China,		Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Israel
	Beijing, China		"OPENASIA", 10^{th} International Exhibition of Sculptures
2007	"Energy of Emptiness", 52^{nd} International Art Exhibition –		and Installations, Venice, Italy
	La Biennale di Venezia, Venice, Italy	2006	Art Taipei 2006, Taipei
2005	"Li Chen Sculpture", Art Taipei 2005, Taiwan		Singapore Art Fair, Singapore
2003	"Spiritual Journey through the Great Ether", Michael	2005	China International Gallery Exposition, Beijing, China
	Goedhuis Gallery, New York, U.S.A		Shanghai Art Fair, Shanghai, China
2001	"Delights of Ordinary People", River Art, Taichung, Taiwan		Shanghai International Biennial Urban Sculpture Exhibition,
2000	"The Transformation of Emptiness – Boundary within		Shanghai, China
	Boundary", Art Taipei 2000, Taiwan		The Contemporary Singapore Art Fair, Singapore
1999	"Energy of Emptiness", Art Taipei 1999, Taiwan	2004	China International Gallery Exposition, Beijing, China
			"Fiction Love – Ultra New Vision in Contemporary Art",
International Group Exhibitions			Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei
	•		"OPENASIA", $7^{\rm th}$ International Exhibition of Sculptures and
2010	Korea International Art Fair, Seoul, Korea		Installations, Venice, Italy
	ShContemporary 10, Shanghai, China		Shanghai Art Fair, Shanghai, China
	Art Taipei 2010, Taipei, Taiwan	2003	International Contemporary Art Fair, New York, U.S.A.
	Singapore Art Fair, Singapore		Art Chicago 2003, Chicago, U.S.A.
2009	ArtHK 09, Hong Kong	2002	Art Palm Beach, Florida, U.S.A.
	Art Taipei 2009, Taipei, Taiwan		International Fine Art Fair, Houston, U.S.A.
	Singapore Art Fair, Singapore		Art Chicago 2002, Chicago, U.S.A.
2008	"The New Spirit of the East", Asia Art Center, Beijing, China	2001	Asian Art Fair, Paris, France
	"The Origin: The First Annual Moon River Sculpture Festival",		Salon de Mars Art Fair, Geneva, Switzerland
	Moon River Museum of Contemporary Art, Beijing, China		China Without Borders, headquarters of Sotheby's, New
2007	"The Power of the Universe – Exhibition of Frontier		York, U.S.A.
	Contemporary Chinese Art", Asia Art Center, Beijing, China		The International Asian Art Fair, New York, U.S.A.
	"Exploration and Revolution of Images in Reality by the 14		Art Chicago 2001, Chicago, U.S.A.
	Contemporary Chinese Artists", Doosan Art Center, Korea	2000	International 20 th Century Arts Fair, New York, U.S.A.

"The Contemporary Road of Media and Tradition – TOP 10 $\,$

李真簡歷

塑十人展」亞洲藝術中心

個屋	€		丹麥・哥本哈根・路易斯安娜現代美術館「中國當
			代藝術前沿展1966-2006」
2009	新加坡・新加坡國家美術館「李真:精神・身體・		以色列・耶路撒冷・以色列博物館「中國當代藝術
	靈魂」		前沿展1966-2006」
2008	中國・北京亞洲藝術中心「神魄」		義大利・威尼斯第十屆國際雕塑及裝置大展
	中國・北京中國美術館「尋找精神的空間」		「OPENASIA」
2007	義大利・第52屆威尼斯雙年展「虚空中的能量」		台灣・台北國際藝術博覽會
2005	台灣・台北國際藝術博覽會「李真雕塑展」		新加坡・新加坡國際藝術博覽會
2003	美國・紐約古豪士畫廊「大氣神遊」	2006	台灣・台北國際藝術博覽會
2001	台灣·台中大河美術畫廊「李真雕塑1998-2000」		新加坡・新加坡藝術博覽會
2000	台灣・台北國際藝術博覽會「虚空化境-界中界」	2005	中國・北京中國國際畫廊博覽會
1999	台灣・台北國際藝術博覽會「虚空中的能量」		中國・上海藝術博覽會
			中國・上海國際城市雕塑雙年展
聯層	₹		新加坡・新加坡藝術博覽會
		2004	中國・北京中國國際畫廊博覽會
2010	韓國・韓國國際藝術博覽會		中國・台北當代藝術館「虛擬的愛-當代新異術」
	中國・上海藝術博覽會國際當代藝術展		國際展
	台灣・台北國際藝術博覽會		義大利・威尼斯第七屆國際雕塑及裝置大展
	新加坡・新加坡國際藝術博覽會		「OPENASIA」
2009	中國・香港國際藝術博覽會		中國・上海藝術博覽會
	台灣・台北國際藝術博覽會	2003	美國・紐約國際現代藝術博覽會
	新加坡・新加坡國際藝術博覽會		美國・芝加哥國際藝術博覽會
2008	中國・北京「新東方精神」亞洲藝術中心	2002	美國・佛羅里達州ー棕櫚灘國際藝術博覽會
	中國・北京「源ー第一屆月亮河雕塑藝術節」月亮		美國・休士頓國際藝術博覽會
	河當代藝術館		美國・芝加哥國際藝術博覽會
	台灣・台北國際藝術博覽會	2001	法國・巴黎第一屆亞洲藝術博覽會
	新加坡・新加坡國際藝術博覽會		瑞士・日內瓦三月沙龍藝術博覽會
2007	中國・北京「天行健-中國當代藝術前沿展」亞洲		美國・紐約蘇富比曼哈頓總部「無疆界的中國」華
	藝術中心		人當代藝術聯展
	韓國「世事而非一14位中國藝術家對真實形象的變		美國・紐約國際亞洲藝術博覽會
	異及探索」斗山藝術中心		美國・芝加哥國際藝術博覽會
	中國・北京「媒介和傳統的當代道路-中國當代雕	2000	美國·紐約20世紀國際藝術博覽會
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