

An aerial photograph of a city street scene. In the foreground, a road with several cars and a motorcycle is visible. A large, vibrant green and pink knitted rabbit sculpture is the central focus, situated in a park area with lush green trees. In the background, a dense urban landscape with various high-rise buildings and a modern glass skyscraper is visible. The text 'OVERSIZE' is overlaid in large, white, bold, sans-serif font across the middle of the image.

OVERSIZE

THE MEGA ART & INSTALLATIONS

Edited & Published by
Viction:ary



Born in Anyang, China, in 1965, Zhang Huan has made a name for his performances in the early 1990s after he finished his master's degree in Beijing and moved to live and work in New York till 2005. Although Zhang has decided to return to China and settled in Shanghai since, his work continues to appear around the world, exploring spirituality and religion's role through materials and forms. Sitting at 66-metre tall with half of his body bathed in the floor, Q-Confucius no.2 was one of the seven works Zhang has created site-specifically for his solo exhibition at Shanghai's Rockbund Art Museum. The silicon sculpture addressed at global issues and posed a question at the religion situation in China today.

INTERVIEW
WITH

ZHANG HUAN STUDIO

What was the project about?

The Rockbund Art Museum invited me to do an exhibition in 2009. The staff of the museum are fond of my artworks and they show great respect to my ideas. After serious discussions, the entire advisory board reached agreement on the exhibition's theme, which was "Q Confucius (Ask Confucius)", and through which we would express the general absence of religious and spiritual support among Chinese people amidst the ongoing, rapid social reforms today.

Shall we copy everything from the West or return to our traditions when human beings fail to remedy the damages they have caused, and the world is about to end as the price of what we did to the Earth? Or will there be a new set of spiritual values or religious beliefs on which we can rely? The project "Q Confucius" highlights the great significance in both the present reality and the future.

Everything we know about Confucius is from text and drawings. What is your perception of him? Which were you trying to portray through Q-Confucius?

Confucius was born in the kingdom of Lu in 551BC. According to the textual study, paintings of the Sage dated back to Ming dynasty in ancient China. In 2011, I created Q-Confucius No.2, which consolidated its existence in history and in me as I revealed it. The details of Confucius' soul and flesh on display were the visualisa-



Q-Confucius No.2, 2011
 Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai (CN)
 Silicone, steel, carbon fibre, acrylic paint
 3.8 x 9.8 x 6.6 metres

There are many wise men in Chinese history. Why did you choose Confucius to address issues that the world is facing today?

How many versions of Confucius have you made in total? What do they represent individually?

Q-Confucius No.2 is made true to life in every way but the size. How do size and scale matter in your work?

How would you say your sculptures have interacted with the environment, space and its audience?

tion of Confucianism, Confucius' philosophical and ethical systems that have been experienced and reinterpreted through various dynasties of China in the past and thus, have been infiltrated into the history of Chinese civilisation.

In the process of making this sculpture, I spent a lot of time reviewing the master's philosophy. Among his thoughts and sayings I appreciate the sentence "at seventy I could follow whatever my heart desired without transgressing the law". There is wisdom behind the saying — a cultivated person does not fight against his fate. While things are on the contrary in the world of art, artists must transgress the general routine so as to achieve his goal.

I am always in pursuit of the sage realm that at seventy I could follow whatever my heart desired without transgressing the law.

While human beings are consuming too many resources on our planet, we are also losing our belief, resulting in today's spiritual crisis. People have no idea how to tackle their problems. Maybe the ideology of Confucius could offer a clue. The reason why I chose Confucius instead of Laozi or Zhuangzi is that the ideology of Confucius is pragmatic and also the most controversial.

Compared with my previous artworks in terms of materials and forms, the artwork of this exhibition is a significant breakthrough. In total, I have made seven artworks for the exhibition of "Q-Confucius", and among them four are distinctly different. Recognising water as the source of life and everything in this world, I asked the audience to think again how we could cherish our world and resources by casting Confucius in silicon, gazing at his reflection in a shallow pool. As for a painting which illustrated Confucius teaching his disciples during a trip, I made my reverence by using ash for its special meaning to me. As well an unprecedented attempt in my creative approach, I also provoked alternative thinking by constructing a portrait of the sage with materials as unorthodox, austere and unique as cowhide; and interpreted the dual nature of man by situating a huge mechanic Confucius in a cage full of monkeys.

Size and scale don't matter to most of my work. What matters is the specific content that an artist wishes to express. For Q-Confucius No.2, size is merely a way to optimise the use of Rockbund's huge gallery space.

I'd like to be in a free state when creating an artwork. And I hope the audience and critics can be in the same free state when they make comments on the works. All exhibited works (in the Confucius series) are specifically made according to the size of Rockbund Art Museum. The way of display is quite different from traditional and formal exhibitions inside museums. To integrate the collection with the neighbouring community, the works are shown

both inside and outside the museum, i.e. an open exhibiting space, to realise direct and mutual communication and interaction with the audience.

We perfectly integrate the works of art into the space, which will make people feel that the work is growing from the space instead of artificial installation. I'd like to have new works for each different exhibition. One of the most important features of contemporary art is to put forward questions. By means of this exhibition, we questioned and confronted what has happened and is happening around us. We hope that the audience could also make questions and have a deep thinking about it during their visit of the exhibition. After all, I have to be true to myself, as well as my work. I cannot just close my eyes and pretend I cannot see.

I worked as a professional artist in the U.S. and did performance art all over the world.

People may be influenced by various life experiences and living environment. After several years of living abroad, I felt homesick and wanted to go back to my motherland, like the falling leaves go back to the soil. The native culture and language supply me with more energy and nutrition for art creating.

I am a person who likes to make changes. I always pursue something new. I don't like doing things repeatedly. I think concepts and languages really matter to art creation. Ash painting is my invention. To me, ash is not simply a medium for painting. It is the collective memory, collective soul and collective blessings of the people in China.

We are planning a tour.

I was invited to have a solo exhibition in Palazzo di Vecchio (the town hall of Florence). When it is realised, my artworks will be displayed inside the museum of the palazzo and also in municipal plaza of Florence, in dialogues with the classical works created by great renaissance geniuses.

You've spent seven years in New York after you studied in China. What did you do in New York? How did your life in New York influenced your art?

The variety of material you've used to create is also key to your sculptural art. How many have you taken to create so far? Which of them is most interesting to use and why?

Where did Q-Confucius No.2 go after the exhibition?

What are you planning on/ hoping to produce next?







028



029

