

Skin of Time

Choi Tae Hoon (Icheon, Gyeonggi-Do, Korea)

WHO MADE THIS SCULPTURE? Choi Tae Hoon makes his Canadian debut with *Skin of Time*, a contemporary steel sculpture installed at Vancouver's Coal Harbour. Choi Tae Hoon is part of Korea's rapidly developing contemporary art scene, one which is now gaining greater exposure outside Korea. Selected as the 2006 Artist of the Year by the Kim Jong Yung Art Museum in Seoul, Choi Tae Hoon has proven to be one of Korea's most progressive sculptors. After receiving a M.F.A from Kyung-Hee University in Seoul, he was invited to attend the prestigious Cité Internationale des Arts Residency Program in Paris which he followed with a residency at the Vermont Studio. In addition to being one of the artists featured at London's prestigious Saatchi gallery in the Korean Eye: Moon Generation exhibit, Choi Tae Hoon's work has been included in the Chungdu Biennale, Chungdu China (2006), the Bridge Art Fair in New York (2008), and can be found in the Moran Museum of Art, Korea.



1



2



3

WHAT IDEAS ARE BEING EXPLORED IN THIS SCULPTURE? Trees represent many things in Korean culture, and they play central roles in myths and legends. There is the Shinsu (sacred tree), the tree of life, the tree which is at the centre of the world, the tree of death and revival, the tree that is female essence and male productivity, the tree of wisdom, the tree of sacrifice, and the tree of history and tradition. Tree Planting Day is a well-established Korean holiday, usually held in April, where Koreans plant trees in support of the environment. Choi Tae Hoon's *Skin of Time* is a sculpture of

a tree which represents aspects of his life. The artist has attached and embedded messages and important mementoes relating to his personal life experiences in the skin or bark of the tree. The 'skin' or 'bark' of the tree contains thousands of little holes and when the lights within are illuminated, they create a glowing sensation. These personal marks and symbols can only be seen when they light up to shine like stars in the night sky.



4

HOW WAS THIS SCULPTURE MADE? Choi Tae Hoon's work is unmatched in its scale and the difficulty of its production method. His studio in Icheon, Gyeonggi, is reminiscent of a gigantic ironworks with sharp noises from the steel grinder accompanied by the harmony of devouring flames and a dull deafening roar. Steel sheets are piled up in every nook and cranny, and his spacious studio breathes with the life of his finished works which are scattered throughout.

His favorite cutting technique is a plasma torching technique which uses compressed air to make minute holes in the steel plate. By applying countless scratches on a steel surface, he produces a granular surface texture like the skin of an old elephant or harrowed paddy field. Steel sheets, textured in this manner, function like cloth and can be cut to create desired forms. As if making a mosquito net out of mesh, Choi Tae Hoon produces an independent form from the scratched steel. The pure geometric structures he produces are then crumpled or creased to varying degrees to create modified cubes. These modified structures call to mind the base of an enormous old tree, parts of plants, discs of mouth-watering bread, or discarded squeezed towels.



5

SKIN OF TIME WEIGHS 800 KGS, IS 7 METERS (23 FT.) LONG, AND 3 METERS (10 FT.) WIDE.

HOW DOES THIS WORK CONNECT WITH THIS

ARTIST'S OTHER WORKS? This sculpture was the second of three parts which were displayed together in an exhibit entitled *Skin of Time*. The first piece is a large geometrical form, 3.5 meters by 3.5 by 3 high, that looks like an upside-down pyramid. Inside the inverted pyramid, there are pieces of plasma-torched steel which resemble trees, and the light inside the pyramid creates their silhouettes. The side of the pyramid functions like translucent glass so that people can see the inside of the structure. The second component of the exhibit is comprised of a huge tree-like structure, 7.3 metres long and 3 metres high.

A third exhibit hall was used for the final piece which consists of various reliefs of trees hung on a wall, covering an area up to 12 metres long. Some forms were left dangling from a somewhat protruding space to create a visual effect of perspective.

Choi Tae Hoon's intent is to bring matters of time and life to light through this series of work. His most recent work expands on the theme he has previously explored: pursuing



6

'the origin of life on the subject of human, nature, and the universe.' However, his work now is much more comprehensive. His earlier pieces were more abstract with minimal characteristics and formal context. By employing pyramids and trees, he is now trying to call people's attention to life through the medium of time.

The artist says, "By shedding light on dead figures such as damaged pyramid and burnt old trees, life is bestowed, and by using plasma technique, the skin of time is anatomized. Through the upside-down, gravity-defying pyramid and the stuffed trees inside, reversal phenomenon of time is encapsulated, and through the exuding light coming from the inside and the piled bark of trees the skin of time is visualized."

Choi Tae Hoon's current focus is on the pursuit of the cosmic divine tree. Once the massive tree-like structure—implying a mystic forest filled with luminous force, a young mysterious land from the beginning of time—is put on display, it'll finally come into its own. His work is an analogy of nature, translated as the mystic forest, and it strives to have visitors feel a reverence for nature while endowing his work with a spark of divinity. The source of this reverence is the light he enjoys using, and the tree shedding light, the artificial divine tree, may have visitors acknowledge spirituality. It is a virtue embedded in Choi Tae Hoon's work that people will experience cosmic spirituality through the blaze emitting from the gigantic tree.

In this situation, Choi Tae-hoon no longer serves as a sculptor, but as a shaman who connects humans, the earth, and the universe. As a proxy of god, the shaman in modern society or contemporary art has gradually been losing his or her function and role. But the more civilization progresses, the more shamans as a proxy of spirituality are being sought. Choi Tae Hoon uses diffusing light in order to give a certain spiritual feeling to steel. It does not really matter whether visitors feel the cosmic spirituality as the artists intends, or whether they simply enjoy the external structure of the work. What really matters is that his work is expanding its reach, and that he continues to push the limits in search of the next breakthrough.

Reference Source: Jinsub Yoon, *Sculpture as a Cosmic Divine Tree*, 2007



7



8

TO LEARN MORE:
<http://hoonchoi.com>

WHO PUT THIS SCULPTURE ON DISPLAY IN VANCOUVER? This sculpture is part of Vancouver Biennale 2009-2011 Exhibition. The Vancouver Biennale is a non-profit charitable organization that celebrates art in public space. Each exhibition transforms the urban landscape into an Open Air Museum, creating globally inspired cultural experiences where people live, work, play and transit. The Biennale features internationally renowned and emerging Contemporary artists that represent a diversity of cultural perspectives and artistic disciplines including sculpture, new media, performance works and film.

The objective is to use great art as a catalyst to transformative learning and social action. The Vancouver Biennale also creates supporting public programs, events and publications including the award-winning BIG IDEAS Education program, the International Artist Residency Program inspired by Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream", the CineFest LIVE documentary film festival and the Tour de Biennale and BIKennale arts & culture cycling events.

TO LEARN MORE you can search the terms **BIENNALE**, **PUBLIC ART** or **OUTDOOR SCULPTURE PARKS** on-line. Also Visit the Vancouver Biennale website at www.vancouverbiennale.com

IMAGE CREDITS:

- 1 Artist portrait; Artist
- 2 *Skin of Time*; Dan Fairchild
- 3 *Skin of Time* (detail); Dan Fairchild
- 4 Artist welding; Artist website
- 5 *Skin of Time* (installation); Dan Fairchild
- 6 *Light Up*; Artist website
- 7 *Skin of Time* (installation); Artist website
- 8 *Skin of Time* exhibit; Artist website

Author: Katherine Tong
Editor: Reema Faris
Designer: Julie Rudd