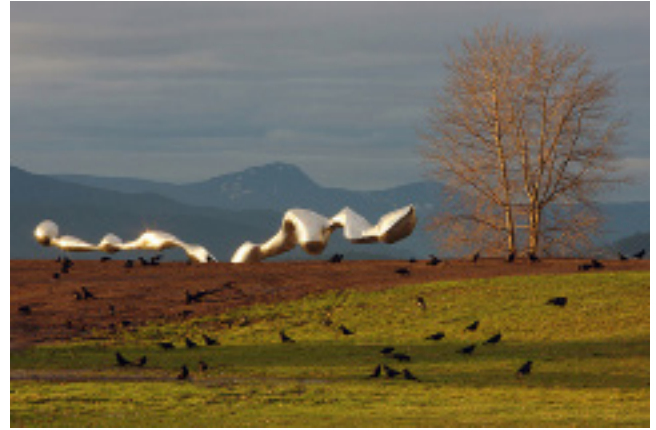


Freezing Water #7 and Water #10

Jun Ren (Xian, China)

WHO MADE THIS SCULPTURE? Jun Ren, who graduated from the Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts, Shaanxi Province, China, represents the energy and opportunity of the 'New China'. Living outside the metropolis of Beijing, he has become a successful and respected sculptor of monumental and historical works which can be found in many cities throughout China, including many emerging industrial cities.



1



2

WHAT IDEAS ARE BEING EXPLORED IN THIS SCULPTURE? Jun Ren's Water Series is a philosophical reflection on the relationship between artistic, technological, and cultural advances and the value of nature. If our development in artistic form, philosophical meaning, and technological skills is focused on the discovery of nature, will we then surpass nature? The human race is part of nature and so are human thoughts. Only when we wholeheartedly use our wisdom to respect and dialogue with nature, can we truly establish ourselves with our discoveries. The artist appears to see human creativity, artistry, civilization, and technology as an eventual revival from death in nature. According to the teaching of Chinese Taoism and traditional attitudes, to reveal the significance of nature is the best approach towards all matters. The Water Series proposes to explore this thought through the form of sculpture. The artist, rather than creating these sculptures, is actually depicting the creation of nature.

To explain the Water Series with words does not fully convey its meaning and artist Jun Ren finds it difficult to find the right phrases to describe his work. Rather, he considers the works to be a suggestion from nature which



3

encourages an exploration of the human spirit. The sculptures are visual challenges in a pure form. When a philosophical reflection turns into a visual symbol, the artist feels it is most appropriate to use one's own eyes to appreciate it. Jun Ren makes his North American debut with the elegant, amorphic stainless steel sculptures entitled *Water #7* & *Water #10* which are on display in Vancouver. The artist draws his inspiration from pure forms: a drop or a spill of liquid water or mercury caught in the air and stopped in motion to reveal its shape.

***WATER #7* WEIGHS ALMOST 7 TONS AND SPREADS OVER 30 METERS WITH NO ANGLES OR HARD EDGES. THE FORM FLOWS VISUALLY AND APPEARS LIGHT AND FLUID. *WATER #10*, AT 16 METERS TALL, IS LIGHTER AND WEIGHS ABOUT 2.3 TONS.**

HOW DOES THIS WORK CONNECT WITH THIS ARTIST'S OTHER WORKS? In the early 1990s, Ren became keenly interested in the question of public art in China. His attempts were directed towards interpreting which artistic style would capture the modern sensibilities of the country along with the origins of the tremendous economic and cultural shifts taking place. In the decade since, he has created monumental artworks which capture the spirit of the time – the anxiety and sense of unbalanced movement.

As China has gradually matured through the development of its economy, technology, and external communications, so Ren has changed along with the mood of his country. And now, as China continues to build its awareness and exploration of cultural identity, these efforts reflect the kind of public national spirit Ren has been expressing in recent years.

His older work embodies a spirit of heroism that reflects the political, economic, cultural and historical characteristics and contradictions that flow through this time of great transition in Chinese society. His recent body of work is a dramatic departure in form and inspiration from his earlier representational work.



4



5



6

JUN REN AND PUBLIC ART IN CHINA In the late 1980s, Jun Ren graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts. At that time, there were few college graduates and the Chinese Government was responsible for job allocation. Jun Ren was assigned to a national unit and housing, an important consideration, was provided as an incentive. Jun Ren, however, was more interested in pursuing his art and discovering the means to becoming an independent artist, a rarity in China. He put on a number of avant-garde exhibitions and during his first exhibition was pleasantly surprised when he managed to sell a painting for 2,000 Yuan. With the period of economic reform characteristic of China in the 1990s, Jun Ren realized that his country was in need of public art. He focused his energy and attention on the development of public art as his source of income even though the concept of public art was not well-developed at the time. Because the cultural history of Chinese sculpture is not a continuum and given the drastic changes the country had undergone, the traditional method and creative philosophy of Chinese sculpture could not simply be introduced into present practice.



7



8

Similarly, classical Western sculpture does not have cultural roots in China and Jun Ren, who had hoped to advocate for the installation of notable Western pieces in Chinese cities, realized that the philosophy did not fit the culture and reality of the time. He began to explore a unique vocabulary and style for Chinese public art and met with considerable success. Ren uncovered a new style of expressing public spirit through public art, and his works express the pulse of the time, the anxiety, impulsiveness and radical mentality plus a lack of an integrated economic and political system. The sculptures depict the passion for advancement within the society. Since 1997, Jun Ren has created art works



9

of diverse style, meeting the needs for public art. They reflect traditional values, yet capture the contemporary exploration and expression of unique cultural characteristics in different regions and cities.

After two decades of economic reform and a more external outlook, the people of China have more opportunities than ever to see and become more aware of the world while the world gets to learn more about China. Chinese government officials, through their continuous study and travel abroad, have acquired broader perspectives and raised the standards of education. They have begun to reflect on the nation and its evolving cultural identity. As art progresses towards a more mature form, China has begun to find ways to express its own cultural values, and Run Jen continues to explore its new spiritual style.



10

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 *Freezing Water #7*, Vancouver, BC; Dan Fairchild
- 2 Jun and Ruby Ren; Dan Fairchild
- 3 Artist working model; artist
- 4 Artist working model; artist
- 5 Artist working on sculpture; artist
- 6 Artist polishing; artist
- 7 Installation, *Freezing Water #7*; Dan Fairchild
- 8 *Freezing Water #10*, Richmond, BC; Dan Fairchild
- 9 Installation, *Freezing Water #7*; Dan Fairchild
- 10 *Freezing Water #7* (detail); Dan Fairchild

Author: Jun Ren
Translator: Katherine Tong
Editor: Reema Faris
Designer: Julie Rudd