

YOUTH

Artist bitten by the bug

You could say his passion for art is bugging him. At Tan Yan'ge's studio in Changsha, Hunan province, there is a retro-futuristic world of insects, which seems to come straight out of a sci-fi movie.

Combining bug bodies with metal gears, mainly retrieved from watches, Tan has built an army of bizarre hybrid creatures, from scorpions and beetles to spiders, all with a touch of steampunk.

In his eyes, every insect "wearing mechanical armor" is a soldier with its own personality. Behind each piece, Tan tries to unfold a story. In his imagination, a bush-cricket is a fully equipped war machine when the world is on the brink of apocalypse, and a giant lobster cricket is a knight in the desert.

"The bush-cricket is my favorite design, which is inspired by the adventure film *Mad Max: Fury Road*. Set in a postapocalyptic future, it is like a character walking out of a film scene," Tan says.

Since 2017, the 33-year-old artist has carved out more than 200 bug carcasses and built them into stunningly sophisticated mechanical artworks. Each is displayed on a black base with a dome glass over it to protect it from dust and dirt.

Besides insects, marine creatures, like crabs, also inspire his creation. One of Tan's artworks features a steampunk box crab marching toward the land, ready to fight others for energy resources.

Popular among the community of steampunk enthusiasts, although still small in China, Tan's creations have been exhibited in galleries in Beijing and Changsha. When sold online, the price ranges from 600 yuan (\$87.3) to 6,000 yuan.

Originally coined in the 1980s, the term "steampunk" refers to a sub-genre of science fiction that is

inspired by 19th-century industrial steam-powered machinery, usually within a dark postapocalyptic future. The aesthetic has been popularized in books, films and video games. It has also inspired many artists, one of whom is Mike Libby from the United States. He combines real preserved insect specimens with mechanical components, in order to create whimsical biocyclo-bernetic sculptures.

Tan came across Libby's artworks in 2017, when surfing online. He was fascinated by the hybrid creatures combining nature and machinery. As a fan of bugs and sci-fi films, he started to learn how to create steampunk insects.

From 2017 to 2019, he was a full-time civil engineer by day, and a steampunk insect sculptor by night. In 2020, he quit the engineering post and the hobby became his career.

"For me, it is like a boy's dream come true. Since I first saw an insect specimen at about 5 years old, I marveled at its beauty," Tan says.

He still has vivid childhood memories of catching ants and grasshoppers in the fields of his hometown. In his eyes, these small creatures provide a different perspective of nature and life.

"Back in my middle school days, I liked to breed insects in glass bot-

Turning insects into steampunk-themed characters has given rise to a swarm of admirers, **Wang Qian** reports.



Above: Combining mechanical components with specimens of insects or marine animals, Tan Yan'ge creates fantastic sculptures with a steampunk theme. **Below:** From Blue Moon crawfish and dragonflies to spiders and bush-crickets, the artist from Changsha, Hunan province, has built an army of bizarre hybrid creatures.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ties, but they all died within a few days. I wanted to preserve them as specimens, but always failed," he recalls.

Besides bugs, painting is his other hobby. In his studio, Tan still keeps his drawings from primary school, which often feature different beasts

inspired by anime and cartoons, such as *Ultraman* and *Transformers*.

Libby's artworks brought these memories back and opened a fantastic world to Tan. With no one to consult or learn from, it meant that Tan had to explore every step of making such creations from scratch.

Through online communities and forums, he learned the correct way to transform insects into specimens and how to reshape and decorate them into robotic bug sculptures.

He acquires dried insects from suppliers found through online shopping platforms. The smallest piece in his collection is a 3-centimeter jewel beetle, while the largest is a pirate crab.

After receiving them, Tan will re-humidify them and carefully peel their carapaces open to remove any soft tissue. He will reposition the legs and wings, and pin the insects to Styrofoam bases, which enables him to add the mechanical embellishments.

"The whole process takes more than a week, which is a test of patience and care," Tan says.

Every day, he spends more than 10 hours at his desk, which is covered with myriad gears and various insect bodies.

Like a doctor performing surgery, Tan cuts a scorpion belly open and spends over an hour removing all the soft tissue and refilling it with sculpting clay. After an anti-corrosion treatment, he begins the creative part — setting a scene and designing the character, which is the "most interesting part" of the process, according to Tan.

Acting like a film director, Tan envisions things, even a complete story, in his mind before setting hands on the insect.

With no background in art, Tan spent about 10,000 yuan for a 10-day 3D modeling course at the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, which allows him to make his imagination a reality.

Applying the technique, he started to create true-to-life models of different environments, such as deserts and oceans.

"Every creature has its own speciality and, in my design, these features are exaggerated in their particular scene," Tan says.

In a battlefield setting, Tan loaded a giant stag beetle with various "weapons" made of components dismantled from old watches. In his description, the beetle acts like a moving fortress. Another of his creations features a dragonfly with its wings spread.

"Under proper treatment and storage, the steampunk insects can last for a long time," Tan says, adding that he believes they trigger people to reflect on the relationship between people and nature and raise public awareness of biodiversity protection, especially among children.

Although steampunk insect designing is not an art form that can be appreciated by most people, and is not a profession that can make ends meet in China, Tan remains passionate for the craft.

In the future, he plans to create pieces inspired by elements of Chinese mythological literature and films, imbuing his work with a more Eastern aesthetic.

Feng Zhiwei in Changsha contributed to this story.

Contact the writer at wangqian@chinadaily.com.cn



Post-COVID rebound fuels thriving job market

HAIKOU — At a job fair in Haikou, capital of South China's Hainan province, recruiters pulled out all the stops to win over the thousands of job seekers waiting in long lines.

Some recruiters resorted to creative tactics, such as singing and dancing, to capture the attention of job applicants, with some tourism employers even offering free travel for those who sign with them.

"It's the biggest on-site recruiting session I have ever attended," says Zhang Biao, a recruiter with a tourism investment company registered in the city of Wuzhishan. "We have received a lot of resumes."

Zhang says that, in the past three years, many staff members left the company due to the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism sector. As the country's economy rebounds following its optimized COVID-19 response, the tourism market in the island province is also making a quick recovery. Now, the company is in dire need of talented individuals to keep its business rolling.

The heightened enthusiasm for recruiting is part of a broader rosy picture of China's economic prospects.

Data from the National Bureau of

Statistics shows the purchasing managers' index for China's manufacturing and nonmanufacturing sectors came in at 50.1 and 54.4, respectively, in January. Both figures indicate an expansion in economic activity.

Eyeing the growth prospects, international institutions have improved their predictions for China's economic growth this year. The International Monetary Fund has raised its forecast to reflect a 5.2 percent growth, up from a previous prediction of 4.4 percent.

Authorities have set a 2023 GDP growth target of 9.5 percent for

Hainan, which China plans to build into a globally influential and high-level free trade port, or FTP, by the middle of the century.

Naturally, the country's economic recovery is evident in the flourishing job market at the FTP.

"I am job hunting and such job fairs really help me to understand the job vacancies in the Hainan FTP," says He Xiaowen, a Haikou native who studied at a northeast China college. "I am super excited to come back home to Hainan and contribute to the development of the Hainan FTP."

"I could sense the excitement in

the job market," says job seeker Chen Jingyi, a graduate from China Agricultural University. "I have sent out many copies of my resume."

To "snatch up" the talent, local authorities in Hainan wasted no time in printing out countless promotional materials for vacant job positions, and sent working staff to job fairs to answer any questions that potential applicants may have.

"We need to be quick if we want to hire new talent," says Zhang Yunhong, an official of Hainan's Dongfang city.

At the job fair in Dongfang alone, 12 local employers received more

than 250 resumes on site, while many applicants also registered online.

Since mid-December, Hainan authorities have launched seven job fairs offering more than 30,000 job positions. More than 4,300 people have signed deals.

Official figures showed that Hainan has attracted more than 500,000 workers since 2018. The province aims to recruit a further 800,000 more in the next five years, with a target of 150,000 this year.

"We plan to hold more campus recruiting sessions in cities like Beijing and Jinan," says Zhao Wei, head of the provincial employment bureau. "We will also offer online recruitment throughout the year."

XINHUA

International Education Column

If you are interested in this, please contact: i.education@chinadaily.com.cn

AD

HONG KONG BAPTIST UNIVERSITY
HONG KONG BAPTIST UNIVERSITY
工商管理学院 SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

AACSB ACCREDITED EQUIS ACCREDITED AMBA ACCREDITED

Be U.
Be a
RESPONSIBLE
BUSINESS
LEADER!

Be part of the HKBU School of Business, where responsible business leaders are nurtured.

bus.hkbu.edu.hk/responsible-leader

ESB BUSINESS SCHOOL

Study at ESB Business School in Germany. Truly international.

AACSB ACCREDITED esb-business-school.de

Heinrich Heine Universität Düsseldorf

US UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX BUSINESS SCHOOL

Join a UK top ranked Business School

11th in the UK for Economics and Business. *US News and World Report Best Global Universities Rankings 2023*

Top 15 in the UK for Business and Economics. *Times Higher Education World Rankings 2023*

1st in the UK for annual research income 2020/21. *Chartered Association of Business Schools*

Accounting • Finance • Banking • Business Studies • MBA
Development Economics • Econometrics • Energy • Human Resource Management • Global Supply Chain Management • Innovation Studies
Leadership • Marketing • Policy • Sustainability • Trade

TO FIND OUT MORE VISIT:
www.sussex.ac.uk/business-school
Or email China@sussex.ac.uk

CONNECT WITH US ON WECHAT AND SINA WEIBO