

It is a beautiful sculpture representative of religious art from the Northern Wei. Though it lost its arms to the ravages of time, it is nonetheless outstanding in its serenity and beauty. **Zhao Ruixue** and **Ju Chuanjiang** tell the story.

Oriental Venus

The lone Bodhisattva statue stands in the Shandong Museum's exhibition hall of religious figures, serene and benevolent, with nothing to betray a turbulent past. It's often called the Oriental Venus, mainly due to its half-smiling countenance and armless state.

Its discovery began in 1978 when Zhang Lishan, a villager in Zhangguan Village, Bo'xing county in Shandong province, dug up the statue while building a house around the site of Longhua Temple, built during the Northern Wei period (AD 386-534).

To Zhang, it was no big deal. Villagers dug out bits and parts of old statues all the time around the site. Zhang threw the excavated pieces aside at the back of the village, where they were taken away and used as tables and stools.

This finally caught the attention of Li Shaonan, the former head of the Bo'xing Cultural Heritage organization and he began to collect the sculpture fragments. Between 1980 and 1982, Li collected hundreds of broken parts.

The Bodhisattva statue was pieced together from three recovered parts in 1980 and kept in Bo'xing, becoming known as the Cicada Crown Bodhisattva after the insect carved on the front of its head.

Unfortunately, it was reported stolen in 1994 from the collection at Bo'xing and not until five years later did scholars notice the stolen figure listed in the collection of the Miho Museum in Japan.

"Two letters indicated that the stolen statue might be in the Miho Museum. One was from the Maecenas Foundation in Switzerland; the other was actually a confidential letter from the Institute of Archaeology



The Cicada Crown Bodhisattva of the Northern Wei period is a precious relic of religious art in Shandong.

under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences," Xiao Guitian, an expert on the Buddhist sculptures at Shandong Museum, told China Daily.

After several rounds of negotiations, officials from China and the Miho Museum administrators reached a deal in 2001, agreeing that the statue be returned to China without any payment and that China would loan the statue to the Miho Museum until 2007.

At that time, Chinese officials estimated that the statue was worth 100 million yen, or about \$830,000. The deal paved the way for increased cultural exchange between China and Japan.

"Currently, we still continue cultural communication with the Miho Museum and the Bodhisattva statue will be exhibited in Japan every five years," Xiao says.

The Cicada Crown Bodhisattva is carved in limestone, and stands about 120 cm tall.

The statue is set against a circular nimbus with a lotus rosette, and it is draped in pearls and ribbon cords with its skirt falling in delicate folds.

"The Bodhisattva's abstract expression is in line with the orthodox Northern Wei habit," Xiao explains.

But the outstanding characteristic is the cicada on the front of its crown.

IF YOU GO

SHANDONG MUSEUM
11899 Jingshi Donglu, Jinan,
Shandong province
9 am-5 pm, daily except Monday
Free admission

Identified with Buddhism, the insect is a symbol of integrity and nobility and has been often used by poets to express benevolence.

In the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220), the cicada also appeared on the headgear of high officials.

Shandong boasts a long history, and is famous as the birthplace of Confucius, Mencius and Sun Tzu, the author of *Art of War*.

Buddhism has set deep roots in Shandong, with many early temples, including the Shentong Temple, built in AD 351 near the capital Ji'nan. It was originally named Langgong Temple (郎公寺), but was later renamed Shentong Temple (神通寺).

Buddhism in China did not go unchallenged. During two anti-Buddhist purges in the Northern Wei period, devout Buddhist followers dug pits to hide their sculptures, thus leaving a future legacy for Shandong.

Since the 1980s, many Buddhist statues have been excavated in different parts of Shandong. Besides Ji'nan, major excavation sites are at Qingzhou, Binzhou, Guangrao, Bo'xing, Anqiu and Zhucheng.

In the Shandong Museum, there is a large collection of Buddhist figures made from bronze, stone and bisque-fired ceramic that offers an overview of Shandong Buddhist figurine art through the centuries from the 16 Kingdoms (304-439), Northern Wei (386-534), Eastern Wei (534-550), and Northern Qi (550-577) to the Sui (581-618) dynasties.

But of them all, the serene Cicada Crown Bodhisattva stands out in its quiet magnificence.

You may contact the writers at sundayed@chinadaily.com.cn.



PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

A scene from Canadian director Larry Weinstein's *Inside Hana's Suitcase*.

Documenting the changes on film

By HAN BINGBIN
CHINA DAILY

The iDOCS International Documentary Forum provides a rare chance for audiences in China to explore this genre through the best productions, and a chance to talk to the master producers and directors behind the cameras.

Since 2009, the forum has screened more than 20 films every winter from countries such as The Netherlands and Finland, both with established reputations in documentary-making.

This year, from Dec 12 to 16, another 20 international award-winning films will greet audiences, including three new productions from this year and 11 from 2010.

Zheng Qiong, the initiator of iDOCS and also the festival director, sticks to one simple principle in her choices — that all films should reflect the themes of "love and wisdom", in addition to being aesthetically worthy.

She promises that there will be no preaching or vague narrations void of solid content. Each story will be a focus on individual life with rich and riveting details.

For example, in the closing film *Position Among the Stars*, audiences will see how three generations of an Indonesian family are torn between traditional rural values and urban pressure against a backdrop of rising Islamic fundamentalism and increasing globalization.

In Canadian director Larry Weinstein's *Inside Hana's Suitcase*, a personal favorite of Zheng's, the audience will follow the search by Fumiko Ishioka at the Tokyo Holocaust Museum

to discover the war-shattered life of Hana Brady, whose name was roughly painted on a battered suitcase that was delivered to Ishioka.

Zheng is not sure how Chinese audiences will receive these films, but says these are the ones that made her "weep, think and refresh" when she first watched them.

It was ultimately the admirable quality of these films that encouraged this idealistic woman to give up her documentary distribution business to introduce them to her countrymen, whom she thinks have been watching "too much commercial rubbish on big screens".

But Zheng says this may be the last year she will organize the event because funds are running dry, and the indifference towards documentaries has exhausted her enthusiasm.

Some local filmmakers disagree. Melanie Ansley, an independent filmmaker based in Beijing, hopes Zheng's feelings are like those of a new mother after birth: swearing she'll never go through it again, but forgetting the pain a year later and deciding to give it another go.

But Ansley agrees it is ultimately up to the audience to decide whether iDOCS stays or goes.

"It will either be your last chance to see these great films and meet these filmmakers who are legends in the industry," she says, "or your participation will bring the forum back bigger and stronger next year."

For ticket information and more details about the forum, please visit www.idocs.cn or call 010-8855-0623/4.

You may contact the writer at hanbingbin@chinadaily.com.cn.

cityguide

BEIJING

Art of the post-1980 generation

By CHEN NAN
CHINA DAILY

Young Chinese artists who are tagged as post-80ers are considered adventurous and self-centered. Their works are usually fast-paced and reflect the latest trend in every field.

However, artist Tang Yuhan, 26, is focusing on something old and traditional — the art of Chinese geomancy or feng shui. In her latest solo exhibition, *Interior Divination*, the young artist has created a series of installations, which she named "sculpture blessings", for her family's good health and fortune.

For Tang, interior decoration is both metaphor and divination, a method of revealing traditional Chinese family dynamics.

In the exhibition space, Tang recreates her parents' home and rearranges its decoration in accordance with the principle of *feng shui* and the divinatory symbols in *I Ching, the Book of Changes*, a philosophical text on the themes of geomantic principles, balance and evolution.

In the two rooms — a bedroom and living room — Tang uses a round carpet, cloth-covered sofa, fan-shaped lights, and a "Water Wall" with water drops made of chrome-plated porcelain.

By installing a series of sculptures that are both decorative and with divinatory symbols, Tang offers a loving tribute to her parents, and meditates on superstition and tradition in a modern age.

Tang was born to an ordinary family in Changsha of Hunan province. Her parents had wished that their child be blessed with talent and Tang grew up studying painting.

During her study with the Central



A visitor poses against Tang Yuhan's installation, *Water Wall*.

IF YOU GO

10 am-5 pm, until Feb 10
UCCA, 4 Jiuxianqiao Lu,
Chaoyang district
010-6438-6675

Academy of Fine Arts, she became curious about feng shui.

"Chinese feng shui has been used by many people and for many centuries. People are trying to learn the philosophy. Through the exhibition, which is an experiment,

"I want to combine the traditional culture with today's modern life. It also displays a relationship between the house, the furniture and people living in the space," she says.

The exhibition's curator is internationally known contemporary sculptor Zhan Wang, who is also Tang's teacher.

"When she told me about the theme, I was very interested.

"I wanted to know what the young artist brings to us and how she uses

ancient culture," says Zhan. "She is among those who have been educated with scientific and practical knowledge.

"This makes the exhibition worth anticipating."

The exhibition is at Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art (UCCA) together with three other exhibitions.

Sculptor Zhan Wang will show his series of stainless-steel rock casts in his exhibition, *My Personal Universe*.

Leading Thai film director Apichatpong Weerasethakul leads visitors through a cinematic narration with the exhibition, *For Tomorrow For Tonight*, which blends video, images and sound from three of his original films and one sound work to create an intensely lyrical atmosphere.

Parallax is a site-specific installation by Kolkosz, a French duo known for their diverse artistic practice and bold, creative use of materials.

You may contact the writer at chennan@chinadaily.com.cn.

BEIJING

Martial-art musical

Louis Cha, the most influential and respectful Chinese martial-art novelist in Chinese-speaking areas, authorized one of his masterpiece, *Demi-Gods And Semi-Devils*, to be recreated as a stage musical. Although Cha's works have been put on screen again and again, it's the first time one of his classics has hit the stage. With the perfect combination of martial arts, sword dancing and music of different styles, audience can immerse themselves into a unique Chinese knight-errant world.

7:30 pm, Dec 15-30. National Stadium, the Olympic Park, 9 Tianchen Donglu, Chaoyang district. 400-610-3721

Liszt feast

Newly-laurelled champions from three major international Franz Liszt Piano Competitions in Utrecht, Weimar and Budapest will present an audio feast together in Beijing. This gala concert is one of the worldwide activities celebrating the 200th anniversary of birth of Hungarian composer and pianist Franz Liszt. The three young champions are Gabor Farkas from Hungary, Masataka Goto from Japan and British pianist Alexander Ullman.

7:30 pm, Dec 17. National Center for the Performing Arts, 2 West Chang'an Avenue, Xicheng district. 010-6655-0000

Ancient clothing

About 100 pieces of ancient clothing stretching through the history of Xinjiang, collected by the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Museum, will be exhibited in Beijing. On display are simple woollens from pre-Qin days, silk and cotton dresses made during the Han (206 BC-AD 220) and the Jin (AD 265-420) dynasties, and folk costumes of the later dynasties. Due to its geographical position, Xinjiang has witnessed many migrations between West and East, making it the convergence of different cultures and civilizations. The evolution of clothes here opens a door to the mysterious and glorious culture.

9 am-5 pm, Dec 29-Jan 16. National Museum of China, east side of Tian'anmen Square, 16 East Chang'an Avenue, Dongcheng district. 010-6511-6188

SHANGHAI

Oil paintings

Abstract paintings by Shanghai-based

oil painter Ding Yi are exhibited. The artist has devoted more than a whole decade painting repeatedly with meticulous strokes, tiny crosses patterns on the canvas. The French luxury fashion brand Hermes has had silk scarves made after his paintings of crosses.

10 am-9 pm, until Jan 29, daily except Mondays. Minsheng Museum of Modern Art, F, 570 Huaihai Xilu. 021-6282-8729

Self-taught painter

Young oil painter Li Xiongyi is having a solo exhibition entitled *World of Innocence*. The artist, born in 1988, left school at the age of 15, and since then has been painting at home. His paintings feature animals, portraits and still life in exuberant colors and simple composition. Although he has no systematic training, his art has won recognition by many critics. More than 70 pieces are displayed.

9 am-5 pm, until Dec 12. Shanghai Art Museum, 325 Nanjing Xilu. 021-6327-2829. 10 am-6 pm, Dec 25-Jan 8. Salon Art 800, 2F, 800 Guoshun Donglu

100 young artists

Young Artists 100 is a touring project that put together 300 pieces by 100 young artists from all over China. These art works, including paintings, sculptures, interactive installations and multi-media projects, have been shown in Beijing and Guangzhou and are now on display in Shanghai.

10 am-6 pm, Dec 11-14. Shanghai Urban Sculpture Art Center, 570 Huaihai Xilu. 010-8840-0376, 021-6280-5629

HONG KONG

Lend me a tenor

Christmas is a busy time of the year for the 70-strong Hong Kong Welsh Male Voice Choir and it is no wonder. The amateur troupe of local and expat troubadours has been one of the most sought-after performance groups in the city since its inception in 1978. Hear these gentlemen harmonize and you'll convert to an instant fan.

7 pm, Dec 16. Hebe Haven, 10.5 Miles Hiram's Highway, Pak Sha Wan, Sai Kung. 852-2719-9682. 7 pm, Dec 18. Aberdeen Boat Club, 20 Shum Wan Road, Aberdeen. 852-2552-8182. 7 pm, Dec 19. Hong Kong Football Club, 3 Sports Road, Happy Valley. 852-2830-9500 www.hkwmvc.com

Sugar and spice

The Nutcracker, written by Alexandre Dumas and set to Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's score, immediately captivated audiences when it was first performed in 1892. A sugar-spun story of a Nutcracker prince leading little Clara to a magical world of dance, it is a tour de force of colorful solos and pas de deux. This year is the 15th anniversary of former artistic director Stephen Jeffries' version, performed by The Hong Kong Ballet accompanied by The Hong Kong Sinfonietta. Don't miss a timeless Christmas classic for the whole family.

7:30 pm, Dec 16-18, 20-24; 2:30 pm, Dec 17-18, 24-26. Grand Theater, Hong Kong Cultural Center, 10 Salisbury Road, Tsim Sha Tsui. 852-2105-9724



MACAO

East meets West

Toast the festive season with song in one of the city's most historical and atmospheric churches. With its distinctive yellow and green facade, St. Dominic's ornate mouldings and soaring ceilings help to enhance the clarity of every note. This year's Christmas concert is organized by the Macao Orchestra and the Macao Chinese Orchestra and promises to be the perfect marriage of Chinese and Western music traditions. Guaranteed to be a treat for music lovers, it is a memorable way to usher in the holiday spirit.

8 pm, Dec 18. St. Dominic's Church, 1 Travessa Do Soriano. 853-8399-6699