

Sculptors' city of dreams

Changchun gets proud legacy from international art

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A culture is only as great as its dreams, and its dreams are dreamt by artists. This is a famous saying of the late US philosopher L. Ron Hubbard in his book "Science of Survival" in 1951.

French sculptor Laury Dizengremel quoted the US philosopher in her speech at the opening ceremony of the China Changchun International Sculpture Conference 2003, held earlier this month.

"Many cultures are afraid to dream, China is not. Many cities are afraid to dream, Changchun is not. Changchun has shown this by inviting artists to dream its multicultural dreams of peace, friendship and spring," she said.

The venue that has enabled 207 artists from 109 countries to turn bronze, stone, plaster, stainless steel or alloy into 315 sculptures expressing their desire for peace, friendship and spring is the new Changchun World Sculpture Park, located on the outskirts of Changchun, the capital of Northeast China's Jilin Province.

Changchun, which is roughly on the same latitude as the US city of Detroit, is one of China's major car manufacturing centres, where the first Chinese-made sedan car, Red Flag, rolled off the assembly line.

The dream is not only about the Changchun World Sculpture Park, but also about bringing all of the artists together to share each other's good wishes through the creation of art.

Dizengremel said she did not believe Changchun would be the site of a sculpture park when she was told this during a sculpture symposium held in the city two years ago.

"But now they are standing here marvelously and amazingly," she said.

"Thanks to this city, we have such a great He E, one of China's most eminent sculptors, said sculpture art has long been neglected by the public, media and even the artistic community, despite the fact that it is an important art form which influences the urban landscape.

"We have been waiting for this moment for half a century. For us, this conference is the same as the Olympics is for athletes," said He, 66, in great excitement.

A gift to the future

The new World Sculpture Park is not only the result of the creations of international sculptors, but is also the result of five sessions of international sculpture symposia held in the city since 1997.

This year's conference, the largest yet, extended the scale of the symposium by adding fantastic art exhibitions and a professional seminar.

A total of 363 artists from 79 countries and regions submitted 1,339 sculpture proposals.

"This time we're focusing on sculptors who did not participate in the previous conferences, so we can include work from all over the world," said Liu Tianfu, vice-director of the Changchun Municipal Guidance Committee for Urban Sculpture Construction.

The artists have displayed their consummate workmanship during the past month, despite their different languages, artistic concepts and cultural backgrounds.

The sound of professional tools started to be heard on August 2 in Shengli Park, a place

where all five sessions of the symposia have been held. After a month of efforts, a total of 32 works from 28 countries were selected and moved to the Changchun World Sculpture Park and shown close to the park's entrance.

Brilliant sculptures made during the previous symposia have been prominently placed along the narrow paths of the 92.7-hectare park.

Sculptors from various cultural backgrounds have found a common cause in their physical involvement with hard and resistant materials.

Thanks to their dexterous hands, huge blocks of granite and marble became heads, hands or family groups, lumps of clay became undulating bronze forms, and steel captured the essence of motion.

The works, while showing the sculptors'

which would surely benefit her work in her country.

Getachew Yossef Hagoss from Ethiopia drew media attention partially due to his unique appearance — typical African clothes and well-braided hair.

He made a sculpture of an African woman with an exaggerated image of a womb in bronze.

"I have travelled a lot in Africa and found that women suffer from the greatest pain and hardship. I created this work to show my respect for motherhood," he said.

Some sculptors who had attended the last five sessions of symposia had also been invited to this year's conference, such as Marianne van den Heuvel from the Netherlands and Laury Dizengremel.

Dizengremel made a work "East Meets West" at the symposia in 2001, in which she presents her impressions about contemporary Chinese society from a foreigner's point of view by carving a multitude of Chinese faces in a Chinese yin-yang symbol-like structure. The work, which is displayed in the park, continues to attract a great deal of attention.

Dizengremel donated two of her smaller sculptures to the newly-built sculpture art museum, China's largest, which is located in the park.

The two-floor museum is located in the southeast of the park, consisting of eight main exhibition halls. Various types and artistic styles of sculptures made by well-known sculptors from around the world are on display there.

The largest hall on the first floor has been devoted to a unique sculpture art from Africa — Makonde Sculpture, an art rooted in both sides of the Mto Ruvuma River in East Africa, this was donated by a Chinese couple, Li Songshan and Han Rong.

He E, the renowned sculptor from Northeast China, the president of the He E Sculpture Academy in Gansu and director of the China Sculpture Society, studied the Buddha statues in the Durang Grottoes, a world heritage site in Gansu Province, for 20 years.

"Our ancestors left us many precious gifts with which we should continue to create new history with our hands tough the creation of art," she said.

He thanked the city of Changchun for the efforts it has made to provide such a large, free and impressive stag for sculptors.

"Here we can exchange art ideas, learn

different artistic styles and get new inspiration for our own future creations. We are enjoying the precious friendship through art and together we are offering a peaceful gift to the world," she added.

A new city with pride

People in Changchun have witnessed the amazing changes that the sculpture art has brought them over the past seven years.

Miao Xiujie, 60, a retired staff member from a local research institute, had visited the park four times within three days since it was opened on September 5.

She took a photo of each of the sculptures and carefully copied the names of the sculptures on the back of the pictures. When she happened to meet the sculptors themselves, she would politely ask them to sign the pictures.

"I do not know English. But all of the sculptors are very nice to me, maybe because they saw I've taken the pictures of their works," Miao said.

"I do not know much about the sculpture, either," she said. "That's why I took those pictures. I will study them one by one after I go home."

When she was asked how she felt about the new park and the sculptures, she said proudly: "How beautiful they are!"

"The next time my friends visit Changchun, the first place I will bring them to is this park," she said.

The park will be opened free of charge to the public until September 25. Over 3,000 people visit the park every day, according to a local newspaper.

Autumn in Changchun is a golden season for marriage. Dozens of brides and grooms have come to the park, using the sculptures as the background of their wedding pictures.

"I came just because I think the sculptures are fantastic and lively," said a smartly dressed bridegroom.

"I think ordinary people can understand the language of sculpture and it is the most visible art form composing a city's landscape. I'm happy that Changchun is becoming increasingly beautiful with these sculptures," he added.

With the new World Sculpture Park, the local people hope that Changchun will be



Motherly love: A local Changchun woman raises her baby to the face of a sculpture at the Changchun World Sculpture Park, located on the outskirts of Changchun, capital of Northeast China's Jilin Province.

distinctive cultural characteristics, also touch upon a wide range of topics, from simple human emotions, to Chinese, Mayan and Inuit cultures and to people's best wishes for peace thought-provoking, either in an abstract or realistic sense," said Cheng Yunxian, chairman of the China Sculpture Society.

Many artists have chosen to make sculptures that reflect the spirits and desires of people in their respective homelands.

Abdul Hai Frahmmand, an Afghan sculptor in his 40s, showed his strong desire for peace in his work "Mother of the Country," in which he carved a white marble statue of a woman while holding a white dove over her head. The woman is looking into the sky peacefully with a smile on her face.

"The woman symbolizes my country which has suffered much from wars, peace is what she needs most," said Frahmmand.

Unlike Frahmmand's realistic work, Celia Rodriguez, from Puerto Rico, made an abstract work named "The Pursuit of Justice," which is one of the most distinguished works of this year's conference.

Consisting of four over-3-metre-high human-like sculptures made from steel, Rodriguez said she combined the figures of a human, horse, lion and bird into the work.

Differing from other works that look shiny and new, Rodriguez intended to leave the steel rusty. "The rusty face will remind people of time which means that the pursuit of justice has never stopped."

As a sculptor, painter and art teacher in a local college, Rodriguez said, thanks to the conference, she has learned about some of the new development of sculpture art as well as the position of art in other places in the world,



Clasping hands: With "Embiosis," a bronze sculpture of two hands, Rubin Mandij from Albania wishes that the whole world can unite in friendship.

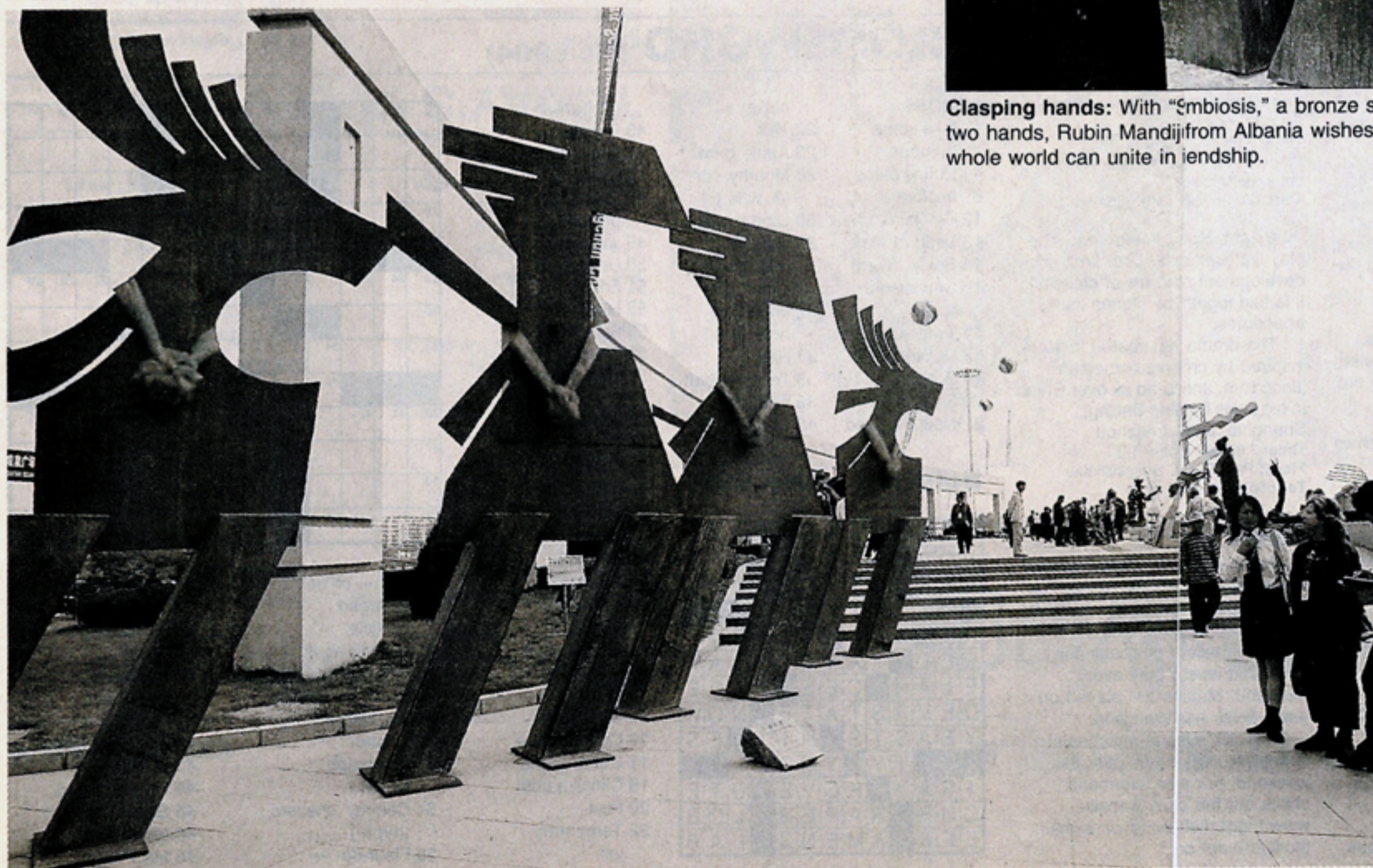


Photos by LI TAIHANG/China Daily

known as a centre for international sculptures, along with its former fame as the largest automobile plant in China and home to a major motion picture production facility, said Mayor Zhu Yejing.

"In the future decade, sculptures will occupy every possible corner in the streets, squares and gardens of Changchun, while the themes, styles and materials used will be designed in harmony with the specific environment," said Zhu.

"The sculptures will be the eyes of our city and also our pride."



Left: "The Pursuit of Justice" by Celia Rodriguez from Puerto Rico consists of four over-3-metre-high steel sculptures combining a human, horse, lion and bird. **Right:** The nearly 20-metre-tall "Peace, Friendship, Spring" by five Chinese sculptors — Ye Yushan, Pan He, Cheng Yunxian, Wang Keqing and Cao Chunsheng — stands as the symbol of the Changchun World Sculpture Park.

