

TELECOM ITALIA FUTURE CENTRE
San Marco 4826 - San Salvador
30124 Venice
10 June - 21 November 2007
Opening hours: 10.00 am - 6.00 pm

I ENERGY OF EMPTINESS

Li Chen

PRESS RELEASE

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC: 10th June – 21st November 2007 Opening hours: 10.00 am – 6.00 pm (closed on Sundays and Mondays)

VENUE: Telecom Italia Future Centre - San Marco 4826 San Salvador 30124 Venezia

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ARTIST: Li Chen

The communication and interaction between multiple human civilizations is accelerated under globalization. However currently the invasion and dissemination of strong cultures make the existence and borders of different cultures disappear rapidly. Globalization is a symbiosis concept, which facilitates life, but it is different from the unification of cultures. Hence, nowadays the free spirit of individual cultures is more important and precious than before.

Artist, Li Chen was born in central Taiwan. He is a very talented artist, who widely studies a variety of Buddhist and Taoist scriptures and seeks truth beyond the material world. In terms of his pursuit of artistic work, he uses sculptures to convey the spirit and connotation of oriental culture. Li Chen takes "Emptiness" as the important concept in his creative aesthetics. "Emptiness" and "Void" are important ideologies of Buddhism and Taoism in Chinese culture. "Emptiness" in Buddhism does not mean nothing, but a huge and quiet wisdom state of birth and death. In Taoism there is such a saying: "When emptiness is crashed, the earth sinks", it describes the utmost state of breaking and tranquility and seeks doctrine out of changes. Li Chen's sculptures investigate the energy of emptiness, but the sculpture substances that he manifests are full of vital energy, which is not empty at all. The reason is Li Chen uses a spiritual style to reproduce energy and uses exaggerated and complete pitch-black substances to manifest the material spirit that attracts people, but the sculptures conveys sweet, romantic, happy and satisfied spiritual concepts. Just because of this, even though some of his works are very huge, they don't appear oppressive and heavy, and seem to be floating in the air. The entire work exhibits an allure of ambiguity between lightness and heaviness, and this is just due to the perfect combination of spiritual and material energy. Furthermore, Li Chen even can make breakthrough on the existing style of Buddhist sculptures over thousands of years.

He changes the thick and full Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618–907) style Buddhist sculptures and the pretty and elegant spiritual and image characteristics of Song Dynasty (A.D. 960-1279) and makes the faces and lines of his sculptures extremely simple. He extracts the elements of China's five thousand

years of history and culture, such as Chinese celestial being, Buddha, dragon, fairy tales and folk tales, etc. to further pour contemporary artistic elements into his works. He successfully combines classical and contemporary perspectives and makes his works have unprecedented unique models and shapes and endows new life to the oriental sculptures.

The exhibition named “Energy of Emptiness” exhibits a number of Li Chen’s large outdoor sculptures. In the work named “Dragon-Riding Buddha”, the Buddha stands firmly with compassionate face. With his right hand making a gesture and left hand holding the purifying bottle, the figure stands against the sky and the ground, yet radiates a peaceful quality that warms the onlooker’s hearts. The dragon itself was inspired by the design on an ancient Chinese copper-cooking vessel, and is filled with energy and a solid sense of liveliness. The dragon seems to reveal benevolent expression with vivid appearance. Each foot respectively rests on a dragon ball, a lotus flower, an auspicious cloud, and heavenly fire. The dragon seems to levitate and traverse through space and time.

“All in One” is one of the representative early works by Li Chen in 1998. “All in One” is the action of putting the palms together, which is a common Buddhist ceremonial act. It not only can make people concentrate their minds, but also can give others a sincere and modest impression. Putting the palms together has the implication of strengthening the reciting ability to make people concentrate their minds to reach a free and tranquil state. The traditional expression and posture of slightly bowed head, closed palms, and solemn appearance are still presented, yet the complicated pleats of clothes and physique are simplified into a concise yet natural and powerful image. The true spirit of the “union and perfection” is realized in this piece. Li Chen’s artwork is not only a simple motion, but also the supreme state of devoutness, purity, and union of body and mind.

In the work named “Pure Land”, the kid lies or almost floats on top of the mountain without any worries and seems to have traveled to another dimension. From a physics point of view, the sculpture should have an unstable structure, but given Li Chen’s ingenuity, he managed to proportion the body and facial expression, especially where the legs cross, to create a sculpture of a carefree, innocent kid lying on a mountaintop. This work encompasses the design of full-figure contour at the same time it houses the exuberance derived from the tension and energy inside the sculpture. The use of raw Chinese lacquer also adds a new facade to its bronze material, which creates a special effect.

In Li Chen’s artistic pursuit, he uses round and soft line and clear contemporary method to convey profound classical Chinese spirit. He looks inward in the oriental realm of thought and empathizes and liberates himself through his works, which is very precious in the busy society nowadays. It is also the projection of Li Chen’s self-pursuit of inner harmony. This kind of primitive and innocent beauty is Li Chen’s style.

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