

# PRESTIGE

## ART FOR ALL

If Xiaorong Zhang's dream comes true, Singapore would be the first country to host her Sculptures Festival which could elevate our cultural standing in the world.

BY EDITORIAL ON JULY 20, 2017 | FEATURES



The film industry has its Oscars, the music industry has its Grammys. So, why can't the world of sculptures have its own awards or at least a long-term festival too?

This is the question that has been lingering on Xiaorong Zhang's mind in recent years. The 49-year-old, who was born in Taiyuan in China's Shanxi province, has a distinct passion for sculptures, having graduated from Shanxi University with a bachelor's degree in the fine arts. She also has a masters in architecture from Taiyuan University of Technology. Since 1992, she has been creating sculptures – about 30 of them are displayed in various counties and townships in Shanxi, such as Taiyuan, Linfen and Datong.

Zhang grew up in an artistic family, with a father who excelled in classic Chinese and oil painting, landscape art and calligraphy. Hence, she picked up drawing from a young age and, as she grew up, she developed an interest in architecture. Going into sculpting was then a natural progression for her.

"Sculptures are a hybrid of art and architecture. To sculpt well, you need a good foundation in drawing, which means I already had an advantage at the start," she tells Prestige.

Zhang, who has been living in Los Angeles for half a year now, has visited sculpture parks and museums in North America and Canada. Her dream now is to hold one sculpture festival on a large scale once every two years, with a festival committee that can advise the local authorities on what to display and where to display them.

"For each festival, we will choose one host city or even a few host cities where we can give out awards to sculptors from all over the world and where we can turn the entire city into a giant exhibition venue so that locals and tourists alike can get up close and personal with the art pieces. My current life goal is to let everyone understand these public works of art better!"

Zhang doesn't shy away from the public perception that sculptures are a luxurious form of art. But she feels that anyone can learn to appreciate them as art is something that every society needs.

"You don't have to be well-versed in the arts to appreciate a good sculpture, which is really art for public consumption. This means that a good sculptor should also be familiar with public space planning. Making a sculpture is not only about your imagination – be it in your choice of colour, structure or even materials – but it is about working with the surrounding environment," Zhang, who has spent much of her working life in her hometown's government city planning departments and managing public property and public sculptures, explains. She adds that even if you do not understand the concept behind a work of art, it has done a good job as long as it triggers a thought process. "It's like how not all of us understand the idea behind a Vincent Van Gogh painting but we can all enjoy it."

Zhang, who was impressed with Singapore's beautiful environment and robust economy on her visits here, thinks that we can become the first city or even country in the world to host the Sculpture Festival on a large scale. The reason? She likes how we have a detailed city planning programme as well as government initiatives that encourage art in public space, such as the Urban Redevelopment Authority's Public Sculptures Masterplan 2002. Back then, this masterplan earmarked selected zones in Singapore for the installation of new public sculptures that could enhance the character of each area.

If Singapore runs the inaugural Sculpture Festival, Zhang, who likes the works of contemporary sculptors such as Brian Booth Craig, Tanya Ragir and Stephen Perkins, is confident that the Garden City would give tourists one more reason to visit. "The festival can also help Singapore enhance its cultural standing on the world stage as well as educate its people on the beauty of sculptures and on art in general," she says.

Her plan is to invite sculptors and artists from all over the world while seeking feedback from the Singapore authorities and public on the best works to display at the festival because she wants it to be inclusive.

"Singapore already has a beautiful landscape. If there's a Sculpture Festival here as well, that would be the icing on the cake!"

