

**THE RISING FORCE THAT IS
CAI ZHI SONG. BY KAREN YAN**

Beyond The Clouds

Cai Zhi Song is now the hottest, most iconic and promising sculptor in the Chinese and international art world. His signature series includes his famous artworks 'Motherland', 'Rose' and 'Cloud'. To date, Cai has had over 12 solo international exhibitions including Singapore's MoCA (Museum of Contemporary Art) in 2013; he holds the record for the largest scale of an artist's solo exhibition in Taipei's Art Museum in 2014; and has also participated in many world group exhibitions as well. Currently, Cai is having his premier exhibition in Hong Kong in collaboration with Galerie Ora-Ora and Leo Gallery. The show will run in Soho and Sheung Wan until January 31, 2015.

Acclaimed sculptor Cai was chosen to be one of the top 100 famous international artists by French art magazine *Art Actuel* in 2012 with his sculpture on that respective issue's cover. His works had not once but twice held records at Hong Kong's Sotheby's Auction for mainland's sculptor in 2005 and 2006. He then went on to break another record with his Cloud's series at Poly Auction two years ago. In addition, this dynamic artist made it into China's *Esquire* magazine's top 10 fashionable men in 2012.

World's famous museums, art galleries and organizations have collected Cai's works including the Newark Museum in the United States, Museum of Rogensburg, National Museum of China, the Central Academy of Fine Arts Gallery, the He Xiangning Art Museum, the Art Museum of Zhejiang, the Art Museum of Qingdao, National Museum of Singapore, Indonesian National Museum, the Deutsche Bank, the Belgium Embassy in China and many more.

"I am a perfectionist at all times," muses Cai. Art Republik sits down with the artist to find out more.

Why did you become a sculptor?

I was born in Shenyang in 1972. As a child, I always knew I wanted to be an artist, and a successful one. I was so determined to achieve this goal that I worked really hard in school and strongly believed that all my efforts would eventually pay off. The turning point was when I enrolled in China's prestigious Central Academy of Fine Arts, Department of Sculpture. Prior to that, one of my teachers suggested that I should go into sculptures instead of painting because sculpting was more challenging and difficult. In 1997, I graduated with a bachelor's degree and then earned my post-graduate diploma in the same academy four years later. I became professor in my graduate school from 1998 to 2008. And I am currently a full time sculptor living in Beijing.

Describe the key elements in your sculptures.

The technical aspects of my sculptures are of utmost importance in creating outstanding and beautiful works. I constantly think about my works and how to upgrade them to the highest artistic level. A sculpture's subject can surely be further developed into different forms and variations. My creativity starts with the concept, materials, techniques, forms, composition as well as spatial factors. In fact, I am a perfectionist at all times.

Where do you draw inspiration from?

When I was young, I had always enjoyed studying history. Egyptian, Greek, the classical periods' sculptures all had great influences on me. In Chinese history, it was from Han dynasty





to Northern dynasty. Central America's Mayan culture also has had an impact on me. I studied the details of the sculptures as well as their traditions. In addition, I strongly believe in Buddhism ever since I was a child. It has helped me to be a more peaceful and cheerful individual with no more complains or hatred. Moreover, I always ensure that I do good deeds in this world because I believe what I do will eventually come back to me as consequences. I enjoy living my life in the present; certainly I am brave enough to challenge the future without any fear or resentment.

Tell us about your 'Motherland' series.

Within 'Motherland' there are three sub-series. The first is 'Ode to Motherland' (1999-2006), a series made up of nine male's nude figure sculptures all in different poses, and most of them made of glass fibre-reinforced resin, copperplate and brass wires. The second, 'Custom to Motherland' (2001-2008), is a series of five male and female figures – some made of glass fibre-reinforced resin, sheet lead, lead wires and sheet plate; and the rest were in bronze. And lastly, the third is 'Refinement to Motherland' (2003), and it consists of a wall petition made of steel plates and two Chinese painting scrolls made of sheet plate, sheet lead and brass wires. I have also created two new works recently: Ode to Motherland no. 10 and 11.

Tell us about your 'Rose' series.

I began to develop 'Rose' back in 2008. It started with my penchant for buying fresh roses from the market daily. I would buy different colour



Previous page: Cai Zhi Song with *Cloud* series in Venice Biennale 2011.

This page, clockwise from top left: *Big Cloud Screen* (detailed view), 2014; *Rose* (detailed view), 2013; *Small Cloud Boat* (detailed view), 2013, Cai Zhi Song.

Facing page: *Ode to Motherland No. 10* (detailed view), 2013, Cai Zhi Song.



roses and always carefully observe their beautiful forms and gestures. So I decided to make some of my own out of soft lead. I always picked the best ones to do my creation. And every rose I make is unique. I use rose as a metaphor to signify love in life. People take different paths for love and experience different outcomes. Accordingly, a rose is a soft and fragile flower which blossoms for only a short period of time. Love is like a rose: it needs lots of time, patience and care to keep it lively and lasting. And a rose's beauty is like decoration, it can beautify empty happiness and life's passages. My new works include a smaller 25x25cm framed version. There is also a single rose which is put in a box.

Tell us about your 'Cloud' series.

If 'Rose' represents love, then 'Cloud' will be life. They are both unpredictable and affect us in many ways. In 2011, I was extremely honoured to be one of the five top artists to represent China's Pavilion in the Venice Biennale. I created my largest sculptures in my career with 'Cloud'. Different sizes of clouds made of dried peony flowers, wire mesh, rubber, resin, and plastic film were filled with helium. The biggest one was 700x400x300cm. The clouds would rise and fall automatically depending on the environment's temperature of the day. These clouds ultimately became my career's most innovative and exciting breakthrough. Viewers felt a sense of zen and calmness by walking freely among the clouds. The gigantic cloud sculptures were well received with both positive and controversial discussions.

What are the highlights of your career?

I gained an international standing when I won the Gangsong Family Fund Award in 1997, then the prestigious Taylor Prize with my 'Motherland' sculpture at Paris's Prize Salon d'Automne. I was the first Chinese in the last 103 years to get this honour. I was then awarded the Bronze Prize at the 10th National Art Exhibition and the President's Prize at the Central Academy of Art. But the highlight of my career was when I represented China at the La Biennale di Venezia with my massive 'Cloud' series.

Tell us about your collaboration with Galerie Ora-Ora x Leo Gallery in this joint "History Rekindled" exhibition.

This is my first experience working with two Hong Kong prestigious galleries at the same time, and is made possible with special thanks to the gallery founders and everyone's efforts in both galleries. I'm showing different works, both new and current, in the 2 galleries. It has been a successful and rewarding adventure. 📍

For more information regarding the artist or his works, please visit the websites of Galerie Ora-Ora (www.ora-ora.com) or Leo Gallery (www.leogallery.com.cn)